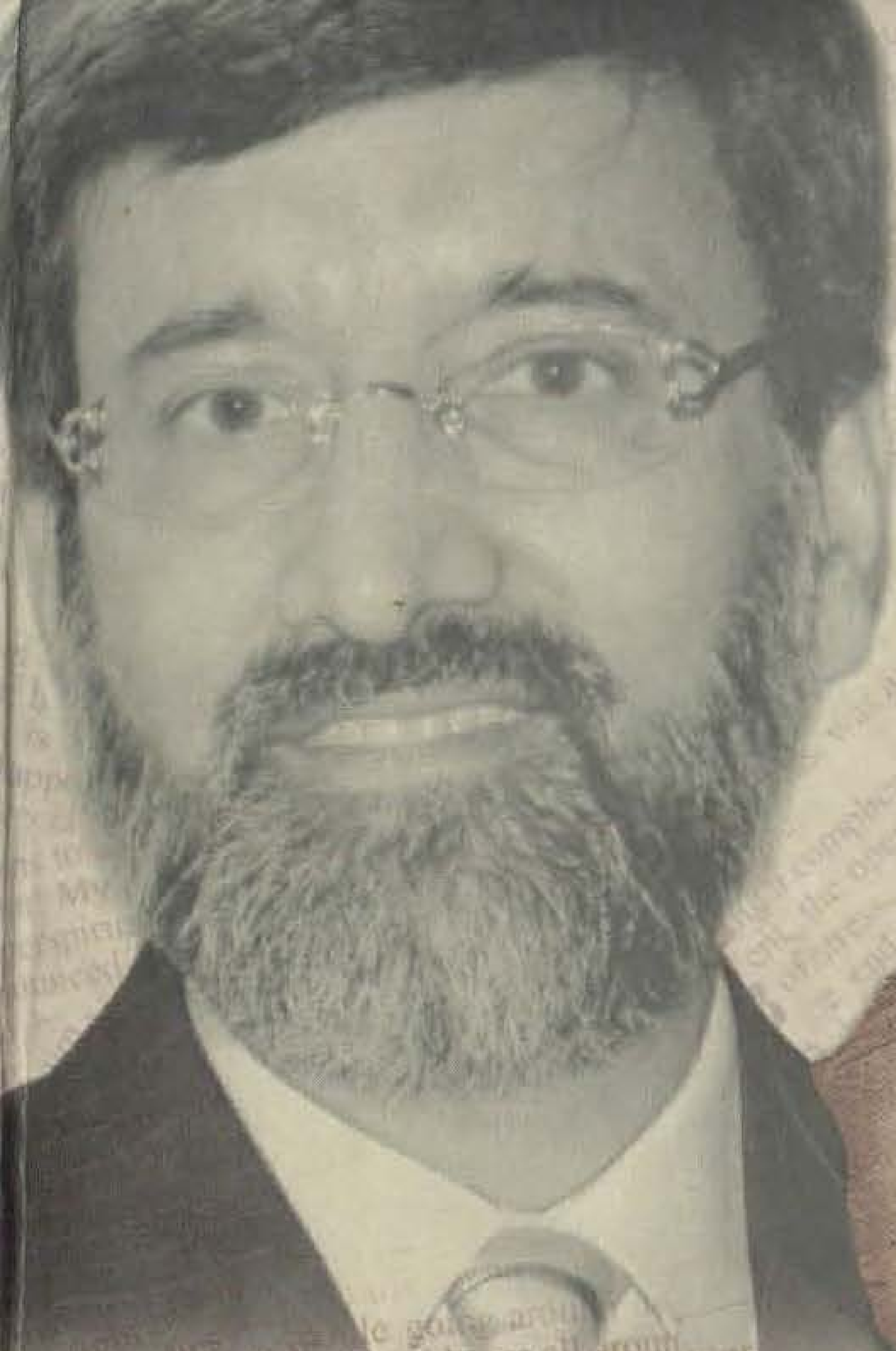


SAGAS of HEART

Prof Dr Mohammad Hafizullah

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DEDICATION

To **Ammie** and **Aghaji**
Without whom
I still feel lost and incomplete
The vacuum they created can never be filled
In their demise I lost my peace and tranquility

PREFACE

Life is a sojourn which has its own charms and woes. It has its attractions and beauty yet marred with uncertainties and untoward incidents. It is a single time experience and there is nothing as a 'mulligan'. How does one lead life is not entirely in one's own hands. There is a predetermined course that one has to tread on. There is a specific role one has to play and then exit! There are many external factors which are beyond a person's control which play a major role and shape the 'destiny'. The destiny - which will eventually determine one's place in history among fellow beings.

How should one lead one's life? What should be the aim of life? What should be the priorities in life? How does one define a successful life? Is riding on an unbridled horse a sane option? Is life worth living? Is it not like appearing in an examination every minute? Is it worth falling in love with a treacherous friend who follows no determined path?

It is in the desert of life that one looks for **'Pillars of love'** as one aspires for a canopy of love which can offer a shade from the atrocities of life. Such 'pillars of love', not only provide props for life but also add sweetness to life. These pillars help to determine the shape of life on a positive note.

Looking back, one realizes that the days spent **'In the Holy Hand'** are the real 'earning' of life. The time spent over there in total submission and dedication, oblivious of the worldly strife is indeed a gift of Allah Subhanu Taala. It purifies the soul and

helps in looking at life from a different perspective. For people like us who are in a perpetual race and mad rush, it offers a unique opportunity to pause, cogitate and reflect!

A doctor is never allowed to take off his 'white overcoat'! Even in the social and religious gatherings we are bombarded with medical problems. A medic cannot cease to be a medic; **'Materia non Medica'** consists of articles based on such queries which are meant for general public who want to stay 'well aware'.

There are a few things which have had such a profound effect on our lives as **'Mobile Phones'**. It has changed the way we spend our time – the spare and working. It has altered our social practices! It has solved many problems of inaccessibility and created many more problems of being 'on line'. When employed for good causes it's a boon and if used for other reasons it's an utter 'nuisance'.

'The Real Facts of Life' contains articles that address the core issues of life. It emphasizes on loving human beings, and respecting human beings regardless of their cast or creed. It evaluates the real worth of life on its 'face value'. It explores newer aspects of life which have remained 'untouched'.

Life will be incomplete without taking into cognizance of what is happening in **'The World Around us'**. It consists of personal experiences in different corners of the world. There is a candle of hope burning in some remote corner that may be one day we will learn some lessons from these nations and put these lessons into practice!

This collection of articles may not only be aspirations and experiences of a person but of all sensitive hearts and curious minds, who have an ardent desire to see our country and people progress materially and more importantly spiritually!

Mohammad Hafizullah

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THE MIDDLE MAN

"I have this pain...," Saeeda Bibi, a twenty year old lady, made a start as she made herself comfortable in the chair, but she was rather rudely interrupted by someone accompanying her, saying, "I will tell you the exact history, I think she has a serious heart problem, and I have been telling her for a long time but you know these illiterate people they don't know anything; she has this pain coming from her right side of heart (pointing towards left scapula!). And has it all the time specially on Monday mornings." There is always a character like this who accompanies patients and stands like a barrier between the patient and the doctor. Whenever a patient is brought to a doctor, he or she is escorted by a close relative and a 'wise man' from the village or family; his 'duties' should be to facilitate the things like choosing the right doctor, getting a prompt appointment, explaining patients complaints to the doctor and elaborating the doctor's instructions (to the patient and his relatives!) but instead this wise man proves to be an 'utter nuisance' and stands like a big barrier between a doctor and his patient!

Before even entering the clinic he would like to get extra attention from the attendant outside by telling him that he is a regular visitor to that particular clinic and he has brought so many patients to this place. This drama, at the same time, is being staged to impress his associates and clients. This invariably leads to a brawl, as this gentleman tries to maneuver

the 'things' to bypass others' appointments and get his patient in, one way or the other. As soon as he enters the clinic, there is a big thunder as he attempts to embrace the doctor and rather demonstrate his strength and the effect of 'tikkas' he had on patient's expenses at 'Nimakmandi'. He would like to occupy the chair reserved for the patient and engages in exchange of pleasantries with the poor soul (the doctor) who hardly has time for these luxûries.

These wise men – are all the same, a little hyper maniac and boisterous, clad in shining clothes with a red handkerchief tucked in the pocket next to a parker pen (without ink) and ton of 'Surma' loaded in their 'intoxicating' (or intoxicated) eyes with lips perennially adorned with an artificial cunning smile. Some how or are the other I always feel like calling them 'middle man'. It may not sound good, it may cast some clouds of doubts on their noble intentions but I stick to my guns –this is what they are. They stand in between the two (doctor and patients) like a villain and deny a free access to the patient. Every patient who enters a doctor's clinic is like a challenge to him which we try to solve with the help of a proper, coherent and chronological history aided by any past, family, personal, drug history and a proper physical examination. This middle man causes hindrance at every step –the history and examination.

To us the most important person (MIP) is our patient and it's of paramount importance that we establish a good working relationship with him. At times the 'gestures' (action) speak louder than words. It is the impression the patient has on his face while describing his chest pain, which is more valuable than the description. Very often what the middle man describes as chest pain (in his innocence or ignorance) turns out to be abdominal pain and what he calls 'gases' proves to be a heart attack. After all where did this middle man get his story from? If he (that's what he thinks!) got all the details there is no reason that a doctor being a professional should not be able to get a proper and adequate history. And if at all a doctor can not do it, he or she should not be sitting in the seat. To tell you the truth, poor illiterate patients are better historians and given a chance they give an excellent account of what they have undergone. It is the patients who experience the pain (or any other episode!) and he is the sole witness to it and he is the best person to describe it!

Limited vocabulary and errors of grammar do not stand in any way between a doctor and his patient. On the other hand, his involuntary movements like pointing here and there and his grimaces offer us a wealth of information, not possible from any other source.

"Can she talk?" or "is she allowed to talk?" I ask with all innocence that I can muster in situations like this to get rid of the middleman. If still it doesn't work and he keeps interrupting I address him, "why don't you listen carefully to our conversation and if there is anything that I miss or she fails to mention, please do let me know at the end." Most of these doodles have nothing to add except to repeat what I already have extracted from my patient. Unless a patient is determined to hide certain aspect of the history, or she is exaggerating certain symptoms to impress her in-laws or recently returned husband from abroad, we usually have no problems to arrive at a diagnosis. We have no complaints or problems with genuine patients, it is only when we have to use 'mathematics' – subtractions, division, addition and rarely multiplication with their symptoms, where errors of judgment creep in needless to mention that this can compound with middleman's interference. Some times the pain has to be divided by half in a forty years old lady and at other times it has to be divided by ten in a young sixteen years lady; In an old diabetic the pain may have to be multiplied by six and in an introvert shy person it may have to be multiplied by two.

I, for one, cannot tolerate anyone standing between me and my patient. The sooner I get rid of him or shut him up the better it is for both of us. At times we have patients accompanied by these 'middle men' while their real relatives like husband and parents, who can be of immense help to us, are made to wait outside. That, indeed, gives us a good excuse to suggest to them to have some fresh air outside while we see the patient inside.

The worst case is when you have a doctor or a person related to the medical field like a nurse or a dispenser accompanying the patient (especially when not related); that is an absolute disaster because this person forms a 'concrete barrier' between you and the patient. First of all you have to bear the 'introductory comments' entailing patient's history (rephrased in his words and approach!) and his 'precious opinion', which I rarely find of any help. All the questions directed to the patient are answered

in a most stupid and misleading way by the middle man. Such a situation is most frustrating and I find it extremely difficult and uncourteous to request the middle man to leave us alone. However at the end of the visit I very politely suggest to the patient, "next time when you are coming to me, PLEASE do not trouble this person (middle man) as he (or she) is an extremely busy person." I am not too sure whether this message ever gets across!

Whenever we ask for old medical record like prescription chits and old tests, these are left home because the middle man advised so. "I thought we will make a fresh start as we have already been to hundreds of doctors but now we believe you will get her better", the middle man hastily says. One cannot help but muse that sometimes later, same story will be repeated in some other clinic, in front of some other doctor by the same middle man.

I have this special request to patients coming from villages; please do not bring these clever middle man with you when visiting us: they serve no purpose at all except ravishing on you money and creating hurdles. And if you happen to be a clever person, please do not try to be a 'middle man' and leave us alone (there is nothing personal about it!); we (the patient and doctor) are better of without you!

How old are You?

"How old are you?" I asked an octogenarian while considering coronary angiography due to her recurrent chest pains. "Well, you know my parents were illiterate and they never used to write dates of birth, so I have no idea about my age!" she responded innocently. Just for the heck of it I asked her, "Oh really, and when did your parents die?" She appeared lost and bewildered and after a thoughtful pause she responds, "I am not too sure, but it was 'many, many' years ago!" "What does 'many many' years mean, and now that you people are more literate, do you write the important dates?" I asked her, while mustering all my innocence. "Well, you know my eldest son has gone to Dubai, the younger one never liked to go to school and my three daughters could not go beyond class two." So that is the end of the story of 'literacy' and 'not knowing age' because of it.

"How old is she?" I asked son of the lady, an 'apparently educated' middle aged gentleman. He went into a trance and looked at me as if I had asked him an 'out of course' question. After recollecting from the 'shock' he answered, "She must be forty or at the most forty five!" I looked at him incredulously and asked him, "And how old are you, by the way?" "Oh, I am thirty eight!" he answered rather sheepishly with a smile. "Are you the eldest or do you have brothers and sisters elder to you?" I asked and he admitted to three elder siblings. "So if you are thirty eight and you have three elder siblings then your mother be less than

two years of age at the time of her marriage," I drove the point home. Not only that the elderly ladies have no idea about their age, even the children are no different. Most of the children have a fixed notion about their parents' age. Most of them seem to assume that father would be fifty to fifty five and mother forty to forty five, even when they themselves cross forty!

"Baba, how old are you?" I asked an elderly gentleman in the hospital. "I am not sure, but I am probably fifty years old. My contemporary friends look much younger than me!" "Do you remember English rulers and their time?" I asked him. "Yes, I could walk more than two miles at that time," he confessed. "Do you have an idea, when did Pakistan come into being? And even if you were thirteen years old at that time, you should be around seventy two years old by now." "Oh really, may be you are right!" he commented without any emotions. He showed no signs of excitement on this revelation which increased his age by more than twenty years.

"I have these aches and pains for the last ten years after my second wife bid farewell to this transient world," informed the patient. "Did you remarry?" I asked inquisitively. "Well, not as yet but I plan to, after a few months," he replied smilingly. "So then, how old are you?" I asked him. "Not more than fifty," he responded and took out his national identity card promptly to back his claim. "ID card reflects the age that one enters in their record and no more!" I informed him. This in itself is not worth a lot and does not prove any thing else. "By applying 'Kala Kola' hair colour and carrying this ID card you cannot befool all the people all the time," I told him.

"Madame, how old are you?" I asked an 'oldish' lady. "I don't know," she replied in a sedated tone. "Are you 'Shull'? (meaning twenty years in Pashto) I asked her. "May be, but I am not sure!" She replied. "Could you be 'Sul'? (meaning hundred in Pashto)" I asked her naively. "I am somewhere close to it," she replied. "Close to what, twenty or hundred?" I asked agitatedly. "Close to both," she replied unpretentiously with a smile. And even after all my questions I had no clue to her age! For her, the difference between twenty and eighty was not much!

Going through his records I asked him, "So how old are you now?" "Sixty years," he responded. "But the medical notes

recorded your age as sixty years, four years ago," I informed him. "Sir, I am not a liar, whatever I said ten years ago, I will say the same today. I don't change my statement," he advocated his case forcefully. For him age was like an absolute statement which is protected from the tides of time!

Thank God, the warriors of first and second World War are vanishing slowly! They would present their age as a riddle and a mathematics quiz. A typical answer to a question about age would be, "I had my beard shaved for the first time in the World War-1". So, the onus falls on you to realise when does a gentleman normally shave his beard for the first time, secondly remember when did the war take place, and finally subtract the time interval and add the difference to it. I usually respond to it, "life is already difficult, please do not make it more difficult for us!"

Every one should know about his or her age! This is not an optional question but a compulsory 'must to do' question. It's not a luxury but a necessity of life! Though celebrating birthdays may not be an integral part of our culture and society, yet to be totally oblivious of age should be declared as a 'crime'. Callousness to the extent where 'Sul' and 'Shull' (hundred and twenty) does not matter should be discouraged. Most of our elders are obviously not too bad in dealing with currency but how come that when it comes to age they cannot careless! More importantly once age is determined by some 'yardstick' please preserve it on the 'hard disk' somewhere so that we do not have to ask same silly question with sillier answers!

SILLY QUESTIONS

Every clinical examination has three parts, first history, second examination and third discussion on diagnosis and outlook followed by question-and-answer session. Many patients bring with them well conceived questions, which are always a pleasure to answer. Some are instructed by their 'well wishers' to ask questions. Why and what questions to ask is left to their discretion! In want of any thing sensible, we are bombarded with questions which have no basis and have no answers. Some of the 'clever' but not 'wise' patients design specific questions to cause maximum irritation and heartburn. Day in and day out, we have to bear the brunt of such silly questions which can only help to raise our blood pressure! Let me share some of these 'silly questions' and the usual 'sillier answers' to such questions.

"What do I do with the prescription?" asked Shabbir, a 40-year-old patient. "What do you mean?" I asked him in bewilderment as to me there is only one use of a prescription. "Shall I buy the medicines that you have prescribed?" he throws another spanner. "Well, as far as I am concerned, you can use the prescription which ever way you like: you can put it under your pillow, you can make a 'Taaveez' and hang it around your neck or still better you can split it into twenty pieces and put it in water and drink it or if you prefer, get this prescription framed and read it twice a day!" I inform him in a serious tone. "But let

me warn you, the only proper and legitimate use of prescription is to use it to buy medicines."

"I cannot take any medicines as I am allergic to all tablets," announces Mariam as she makes herself comfortable in the chair before the examination. "Madame, I am sure you know that I am neither a 'Faqir' nor a 'Hakeem' who can offer you a 'Dua' or a 'Taaveez', unfortunately I have only been trained to write prescription and dole out drugs: the choice is yours if you do not want to take drugs let's call it a day right now!" I reveal to her a well-kept secret. "By the way, no human being can possibly be allergic to all drugs: This is just not possible!" I add to her information. "And if you do not intend to take medicines please do not bother to visit doctors!" I offer her a free piece of advice.

Some people have been tutored at home to torment the doctor with unnecessary questions. After listening to his complaints, conducting the clinical examination, reviewing the reports and explaining the nature of illness and the likely outcome I hand over a pile of documents including the prescription to him. He walks to the door and then turns back to ask, "Doctor, have you written the medicines for me?" "What do you think I have been scribbling on the piece of paper called 'prescription' and what else do you think I can do for you but to write drugs?" I ask him. The only present that we can offer a patient after 'all the sweat' is a piece of paper bearing instruction and drugs. And of course 'no one' leaves a doctor's office empty handed!

"Well, you seem to be doing very well and all you need to do is to take your medicines regularly and you may eat what ever you like in moderation," I inform the patient after the clinical examination. "What shall I eat?" he asks. "I explained to you that as you are progressing well, so you do not have to be very discreet in you diet," I add on. "But there must be some things that I shall not take and some that I must take!" he says emphasising 'shall and must'. "Your tests are fine and you do not need any dietary restriction," I reiterate. "But there must be ..." he insists. I have an incessant desire to quote our old professor, "Do not eat my brain, do not eat your own brain and do not touch human excreta."

It is understandable that people come from far-flung areas and they have to return home the same day. Many of our

patients do not have their private transport and have to depend on public transport. But of course every one cannot be seen at the same time. Moreover, some one has to wait so that the other person can be examined by the doctor. Every one wishes that he or she should be seen immediately irrespective of all others waiting for their turn! Among many demands the topmost question is, "Can I walk straight into your OPD or clinic, so that I do not have to wait for you?" What shall be the answer to such a weird question?

"Since your cholesterol is high, you must avoid butter, cheese, egg and ghee!" I inform Kareem after looking at his blood test report. "Then, what do I eat?" he asks pulling a straight face. "Is there nothing else in the world to eat if you avoid these four things?" is a natural question from my side. This does not satisfy him, so he shakes his head again, conveying that he still does not understand. "You can have everything in the world but cheese, ghee, butter and egg." "Please give me in writing, what I can eat and what I cannot!" he seems to have unlimited persistence. "These four things you must not have and every thing else you can have in moderation. And this does not merit any further discussion. And moreover I have already given you a chart of dos and don'ts!" I end the discussion. It is at times like this that I am reminded of waiters in non-star restaurants churning out menus like dal gosht, bindi gosht, dal gosht, palak gosht, khali sabzi. Some people are obsessed about 'clear cut' instructions and whether they will follow them is any one's guess!

Our usual day starts at eight with a meeting in the morning, followed by a ward round or a session in the Catheterisation laboratory and followed by many meetings at different levels. After a brief break for prayers and lunch starts another marathon session of clinic. Every patient that enters the clinic, is like a new challenge where he downloads all his miseries and presents a new problem. At the end, when you reach home at the end of a long day one hits the bed after food. Then what shall be response to a question like this: "Please give me your mobile number, so that I can seek your advice. Can I call you any time?"

There is a special class of patients who are half literate and having sought opinions from many practitioners have turned into 'professional patients'. You always expect questions like, "What are the side effects of these tablets?" Every drug has side

effect but one has to weigh pros and cons. Every doctor takes all side effects and interactions into consideration before prescribing any drug. Such a person is bound to come back the next day, with the side effect the doctor mentions by mistake. "If I tell you about the side effects of crossing the road, like being run over by a car, motorbike, truck or a bus, would you stop crossing the road?" and I add, "the side effects mentioned in the pamphlet accompanying the drug is not meant for you but for our information. Please do not bother yourself reading them"

"What happens if medicines do not suit me?" is another silly question asked by some 'expert' patients. "When that happens we will consider other options, as the Chinese proverb dictates, you cross the bridge when it comes!" Many of our so-called 'clever' patients do not take drugs due to the possible side effects. Some are paranoid about side effects! Every thing that has some effect may have side effect as well!

Looking after the ailing humanity is a sacred duty and a source of satisfaction and joy. Most of our patients are a perennial source of prayers for us. However, some are a source of headache and heartache. It is while answering these silly questions, that we sometime lose our patience and perhaps sanity. Please do forgive us for that as there can possibly be no answers to such silly questions!

High Blood Pressure – Silent Killer

I could not believe my ears! No, this could not be true. I had always considered myself very healthy – hale and hearty. But now the things have changed. The doctor told me, in a matter of fact way, that I had high blood pressure. It was a routine check up as I was under the weather for a few days and not feeling 'too bright'. I never had any headache or nose bleed. Never in my life, I had any giddiness or any other such problem. I still enjoy my life, work, food and walk. I started with 'total denial', asserting that some thing must be wrong with the equipment or the technique. After some time, the reality dawned upon me, that I have crossed forty, my job is quite stressful and I have not been very regular in my exercise programme. And after all these diseases have been created for mortals like us! Did the disease encroach on me in the darkness of night and that too so quietly, I asked myself?

My biggest worry was to know whether I was the only person afflicted with this problem? I tried to learn how common was this illness? The figures revealed to me by Cardiologist were an eye opener for me. High blood pressure is supposed to be a 'silent killer', which implies that many of us are going around without recognizing the problem, as we do not experience any abnormality till it claims its toll. According to the latest research the disease is quite common in Pakistan. After forty years of age

nearly forty percent of people have high blood pressure – a little less than half the population. He quoted me a recent study conducted in Europe recruiting a total of 16,300 men and 5075 women aged 35–74 years. The prevalence of hypertension was 41% in men and 31% in women. The rule of half dictates that half of the population has high blood pressure, only half of them know about it and further half of them are treated and only half of them have their blood pressure controlled.

Does only one high recording of blood pressure declare me 'hypertensive'? "No," declared my doctor and his explanation made a lot of sense. Blood pressure is supposed to fluctuate with mood, and exercise. Any physical and mental exertion can push blood pressure up. Blood pressure is like 'fuel' of a car, as it requires more fuel when it runs faster. Similarly, any strenuous mental or physical activity has to be supported by high blood pressure. So naturally blood pressure recorded under stress does not reflect 'the true status'. Labeling some one as hypertensive is not as easy as it seems. Blood pressure can be estimated digitally by automated machines and many non-doctors have professed the technique of checking blood pressure. But the right to diagnose and label some one as hypertensive and hence subjecting the person to life long 'imprisonment of drugs' should be a very serious affair and left to people who are trained for it.

Those who have very high blood pressure and have signs of it effects on the body have all the evidence to be started on medical treatment. But it's people like me, who present with a little raised blood pressure, who are diagnostic problems. Some times blood pressure will be a little high and at other times it may be absolutely normal. In my condition I did not want to be started on treatment. I did not want to be subjected to life long imprisonment on 'very little' evidence so to say. I learned that blood pressure has to be checked in a quiet environment, in a sitting position with arm supported after adequate rest. It must be checked in both arms at least once, and certain situations demand that it should be checked in lying and standing positions. Blood pressure checked hurriedly in a clinic or hospital does not reflect the true status. A proper protocol has to be followed to check blood pressure and document it and take action on it.

My blood pressure was checked many times and at a few occasions it turned out to be nearly normal. My doctor recommended 'ambulatory blood pressure monitoring' for me. This new piece of equipment is of great help in proper diagnosis if readings are conflicting. This records blood pressure over twenty-four hours. Though it is a little cumbersome but I was able to hide it under my shirt and carry it around. I conducted my day in the usual way including my evening stroll and game of golf. It issues a discreet warning and then the cuff inflates. The only precaution I had to exercise was to keep my arm straight. At the end of the day I received a very comprehensive report. Along with my family we sat down to discern the report. Some things were easy to understand as it gives average blood pressure for morning, evening and night. As expected it was highest early in the morning along with all the stress of the coming day. It decreased slightly after the office hours and the little increase during the walk was understandable. Night record revealed a considerable dip almost below normal. Later, I was told by the doctor that the 'dipping' of blood pressure at night was a good sign. I had in depth discussion with my doctor who decided that blood pressure was on the higher side and I needed to do something.

What is normal blood pressure? I found that this was perhaps the most difficult part of the story. I was told that what was normal for me may not be normal for anyone else. To chose abnormal from normal is perhaps the trickiest piece of the jigsaw puzzle. Which reading reflects my true status, when I am standing, sitting or lying, I wondered? On which reading shall I be declared as hypertensive – immediate recording or recording after five minutes? Which recordings decide my fate- those recorded by the doctor, self recorded by the automatic digital machine, recorded by next-door neighbour or ambulatory blood pressure recorder? The decision to start treatment depends not only on the level of blood pressure, but also on assessment of total cardiovascular risk and the presence or absence of target organ damage.

Through various sources I learnt that drug therapy should be initiated promptly in individuals with a continously raised upper/systolic blood pressure more than 180 mmHg and/or lower diastolic blood pressure (DBP) higher than 110 mmHg

regardless of other factors. Individuals at high risk of developing heart diseases with sustained upper/systolic blood pressure SBP of more than 140 mmHg and/or diastolic blood pressure (DBP) more than 90 mmHg also require drug treatment. For such individuals, drugs should be used to lower blood pressure to less than 140/90 mmHg. Similar elevation of blood pressure in low-risk people without any damage to target organ like heart , kidney, brain and eyes should be followed closely, and lifestyle advice should be given. Drug treatment might be considered after asking the patients' preference. With few exceptions, persons with SBP > 140 mmHg and/or DBP > 90 mmHg do not need drug therapy. Patients with a high or very high cardiovascular risk profile and patients with diabetes and kidney problems can benefit from reducing blood pressure below the goal of SBP less than 140 mmHg and/or DBP less than 90 mmHg. For most patients, the goal of therapy is blood pressure less than 140/90 mmHg, but for patients with diabetes and individuals at high total heart diseases risk, the blood pressure goal should be lower.

Suddenly I realised that hypertension does not attack a person in isolation rather it is helped by other risk factors as well. Other problems which need to be identified and tackled are obesity, smoking, high cholesterol, diabetes besides taking into cognisance of age, sex and family history. I thought that since I did not have other risk factors I will try to persist with non drug treatment.

Antihypertensive drugs should not only lower blood pressure effectively. They should have a favourable safety profile and be able to reduce cardiovascular morbidity and mortality.

THE SILENT KILLER – THE EVIDENCE

The latest data proves that high blood pressure is assuming the proportion of an epidemic in Pakistan. There is an urgent need to create awareness and sensitize the medical community to hypertension - the 'silent killer'. We need to recognize the dimension of the problem, take into stock the measures being adopted at present and strive to evolve a strategy to minimize its hazardous effects on our people.

According to the National Health Survey of Pakistan (NHSP) 1990-94, there were an estimated 5.5 million men and 5.3 million women with hypertension. The prevalence of hypertension over the age of 15 years was reported as 20% being one in five. With a higher prevalence observed in urban areas (21.5% vs. 16.2%). Over the age of 45 years, prevalence was reported at 33%, implying that one in every three Pakistanis over the age of 45 years suffers from high blood pressure. Recent reports have suggested that this difference can be accounted for by body mass and waist circumference. A similar prevalence of 15% over the age of 18 years and 36% over the age of 60 years has been reported in another survey conducted in the Northern Areas of Pakistan. Another population survey also reported similar trends, with prevalence estimates of 31.5% (above 140/90 mm Hg); 11.9% of the individuals above the age of 40 were reported to have blood pressure levels above 160/100 mm hg.

After forty-five years of age nearly forty percent of people have high blood pressure – a little less than half of the population. Almost similar figures were quoted by a recent study conducted in Europe showing prevalence of hypertension as 41% in men and 31% in women. The rule of half dictates that nearly half of the population has high blood pressure, only half of them know about it and further only half of them are treated and only half of them who are treated have their blood pressure controlled. In Pakistan the figures are more alarming as according to the National Health Survey of Pakistan (NHSP) hypertension control rate in our country is only 3%, which is among one of the lowest control rates in the world.

Elevated blood pressure has been established as a major risk factor for coronary heart disease, heart failure, cerebro-vascular disease like stroke and TIA and renal failure in a large number of epidemiological studies. Hypertension is associated with an increased incidence of dementia and correlate negatively with cognitive function. As compared to individuals with normal blood pressure, hypertensives have more commonly other risk factors for cardiovascular disease such as diabetes, insulin resistance, and lipid disorders. As the risk factors interact positively with each other, this makes the overall cardiovascular risk of hypertensive patients higher even in patients with mild or moderate elevation of blood pressure.

New data provide evidence that in hypertensive patients in whom treatment effectively controls blood pressure overall cardiovascular morbidity remains higher than that of normotensive controls. This may be due to irreversible organ damage at the time of start of treatment, highlighting the need for earlier identification. To achieve better results, perhaps a more aggressive blood pressure reduction to lower targets is required. Is it enough to control figures on the manometer or is it that in hypertensive patients the overall cardiovascular risk profile has to be modified positively? Some new evidence suggest:

- Efficacy of Cholesterol lowering drag statins has been proven in primary and secondary prevention. A recent study offers the evidence of major reduction in cardiovascular disease (–30-40%) and stroke (–27%) by addition of statin to their regular anti hypertensive treatment in patients with

almost normal cholesterol levels. This suggests that, in hypertensive patients, lipid-lowering treatment may be of additional benefit even if cholesterol levels are within normal limits.

- Evidence suggests that in hypertensive patients with an adequate blood pressure control, the addition of acetylsalicylic acid Aspirin at a low daily dose further decreases (-35%) the incidence of myocardial infarction. The benefit being particularly evident in the male gender and in the subgroup with renal damage. Thus antiplatelet treatment should be considered in hypertensive with blood pressure control.
- There is evidence that in patients with type II diabetes mellitus or with diabetic nephropathy, achievement of blood pressure values well below the traditional ones is associated with a lower incidence of cardiovascular and renal events. The latter is the case particularly in the presence of marked proteinuria. In patients with diabetes and renal failure blood pressure has to be reduced to lower target.
- In "white coat" or "isolated clinic" hypertension, cardiovascular risk is less than that of subjects with established hypertensive. But these subjects have been shown to have a greater prevalence of organ damage than controls, which makes its clinical innocence still controversial. Physicians should thus be aware of this fact to address it carefully. That is, they should monitor these patients closely if drug treatment is not implemented and favour an active blood pressure reduction if there is organ damage or additional cardiovascular risk factors. This evidence suggests that the approach to hypertension needs to be changed! We should recognise that patients with apparently mildly raised blood pressure and labelled as 'white coat hypertension' or isolated clinic hypertension are at higher risk and merit close follow up and some form of intervention.

Blood pressure may have to be brought down to lower levels with drugs and in special conditions the targets may even be lower. Blood pressure should not be regarded as a 'target' in its own right. It should be viewed as one of the risk factors, opening door of information for evaluation of total cardiovascular risk

profile. In a hypertensive, the emphasis should not only be adequately control blood pressure but it must include amelioration of all other risk factors. Obviously, control of figures on manometer should be like fixing up of one piece of jigsaw puzzle, other pieces/risk factors are equally important and merit similar attention. The addition of 'other therapeutic agents' like lipid lowering drugs and aspirin shown to be helpful in such patients should be given due consideration and incorporated in our daily medical practice.

FACING A SILENT KILLER

Up till now I have not been labeled as 'hypertensive' but somewhere on the line that title of being 'absolutely normal' was taken away from me. Though I had no problems as headache or feeling giddy or getting upset on trivial yet I felt restless. The feeling of not having a disease but not being declared as normal was quite annoying. So I started checking blood pressure more frequently. Three times a day I would check my blood pressure using a digital machine. My daily life routine changed as it started with checking blood pressure first thing in the morning, second time I would check after coming from the office and the last ritual of the day was to check blood pressure again before hitting the bed. In between I started remembering my old forgotten doctor friends to recheck blood pressure. Needless to say I bought another machine to check blood pressure during office hours and another 'made in Japan' for better results.

This created new problem! Now I was inundated with data that I found difficult to handle. My life was now being regulated by these figures. A little 'low reading' will bring a smile on my face and a little high will turn my hair grey. Very soon, I realized it was a torture, to which I was subjecting my self, for no good reason. My doctor, who had warned me against it, had a big smile on his face when I finally broke the news to him of discontinuing this 'self inflicted torment'.

Why do we need to treat blood pressure? My Cardiologist informed me that figures recorded on the blood pressure apparatus do not mean a lot in themselves. Increase pressure in the tubes carrying blood effects four important organs. These are called as 'target organs'. They are brain, kidney, heart and eyes. There is direct effect due to increase pressure but more importantly there is indirect effect due to 'narrowing of the vessel' called atherosclerosis. High blood pressure accelerates the process of atherosclerosis. This results in blockages and reduced blood supply to these important target organs. Total cessation of blood supply causes 'death' of that particular tissue. Heart attack occurs when a portion of heart is denied its blood supply. A stroke- paralysis is a result of abrupt cessation of blood supply to brain. Reduced blood supply obviously affects the working of the organ it supplies. Reduced supply to heart causes coronary artery disease leading to angina and heart failure. Decreased blood flow can have deleterious effects on kidneys leading to renal failure. Transient ischaemic attacks are like partial paralysis with full recovery, the most important cause for this is high blood pressure. High blood pressure can have serious effects on eyes leading to blindness in many cases. Blood pressure has to be controlled to prevent damage to these organs. What ever strategy is adopted, blood pressure has to be controlled meticulously to ensure smooth working of these very important organs of body.

"No, I am not going to take drugs," I told my doctor in a decisive tone. He readily agreed with me. It spread such a smile on his face as if his most aspired wish had come true! And he confided that most of patients want to take the easy course by just 'swallowing a few tablets' as against really 'fighting it out'. I was determined to control it by 'non-drug' intervention. I was told to reduce the salt intake and without going into how many grams of total salt and how much sodium I was allowed, I took some practical steps. I instructed the cook to reduce salt by at least one third. Initially children raised some hue and cry but it was surprising to note all of us got used to it in a few weeks. I removed the salt shaker from the dining table. No salt on salads and 'chatni' had to be salt-less. 'Achar' has very high salt content, so its entry was banned on the table. Sprinkling salt on fruits like guava or watermelon was strictly prohibited. Extra

salt used in the form of 'Lassi' was banned. When ever possible I would prefer 'roti' without salt. I would have second thoughts before indulging in high salt food items like Pizza and 'fried' food. While on a visit abroad I found many people were doing exactly what I was practicing- looking at the label for salt content before buying any food item.

My second big initiative was regular exercise. I had always thought that I did not need exercise as I had a fairly active job and I did not have a big enough paunch to be proud of. My second notion was that I am far too busy to indulge in the luxury of enjoying an evening stroll. Little I had realised that it was not a luxury but a 'necessity' and I had to create time for it on priority. It had to be given its due importance. The first step was to buy a comfortable pair of joggers, second to define the area for walking and then to decide on time. And then every evening at five thirty after Aasir prayer I would change into a jogging track and walk at a brisk speed for at least thirty minutes.

Initially it was difficult and I had to force myself but later I started looking forward to it. And 'walk' became the best part of the day. Any day that I would miss my walk, I would feel as if some thing important is being left out. I used my walk to recite what ever I have learnt and offer all 'tasbeehat' that I should have been offering. More over it gave me an excellent opportunity to contemplate on problems I was facing. Breathing fresh air early in morning or in the coolness of evening is an unmatched 'luxury'. After my regular walk I would feel fit and more energetic. I found that my performance improved and I became more organized. I had a plan for the day, which is perhaps the most important thing. After a few weeks when I started enjoying walk and felt the effects of it on my body, I rechecked my blood pressure. My blood pressure dropped to normal and I started feeling more 'active and fresh'. I felt on the top of the world as I defeated 'hypertension' and became a 'normal' person again.

Two simple 'free' interventions returned my peace of mind and restored my 'health'. I thank my stars for using my mind and not resorting to drugs. Both these interventions were easy to practice and slowly ingrained in my life style. If I had started drugs, I would have been stuck with them for the rest of my life. I was told by my doctor, that the drugs are continued even if the

blood pressure is within normal limits. This is exactly what 'sentencing to life long imprisonment to drugs' means.

What to do if blood pressure does not budge with these simple interventions? What to do if blood pressure refuses to fall within normal limits with all these non-pharmacologic maneuvers? Naturally this leaves little choice but to use drugs. Though it is best left to doctors to prescribe the drugs yet it is important that we as patients should have some background knowledge.

PRESCRIBING DRUGS – SUICIDE AND HOMICIDE

Jamshed rang me up thrice in an hour as he was not feeling well! He was feeling dizzy and had problems on standing erect. His colour was ashen grey and forehead was covered with a thin layer of sweat. On examination his heart rate was extremely slow and blood pressure quite low, which made me nervous. His condition was baffling and my mind was going through the list of possible causes without any success. Usually when blood pressure decreases, heart rate increases to compensate and maintain the output. On repeated enquiries and cross questioning, he admitted to taking some drug in addition to his own blood pressure pills on the advice of his friend, who happened to be a 'highly learned' and 'well read' bureaucrat. He had inadvertently taken two types of drugs which had synergistic effect on reducing heart rate and blood pressure. This combination caused a marked reduction of blood pressure and heart rate, which could have caused him his life.

Haseeb, a thirty years old medical representative, came to me all bloated up and breathless on walking a few steps. He was perfectly well and mobile till a fortnight. He had a minor accident when he hurt his left knee. Instead of consulting a doctor he took upon himself to take potent painkillers. Having a low threshold, he started taking them more frequently and liberally. He started vomiting but kept on taking his pain killers.

His urine out put started decreasing and he started becoming breathless on exerting a little. On examination and blood tests it transpired that he had damaged his kidneys because of self-medication and excessive dosage of pain killers, which happened to be non-steroidal anti-inflammatory in this particular case.

One of the senior doctors, who had decades of experience to his credit, was brought to the hospital by his relatives in left ventricular failure presenting with breathlessness. On enquiry it revealed that he had been having 'gaseous distension' which improved on belching for the last three days, which he ignored as a 'gas trouble'. He had been taking antacids and a newer class of drugs called proton pump inhibitors with little if any response. His present condition was the manifestation of a heart attack, which he misconstrued as stomach trouble and caused unnecessary delay in seeking medical expert help and wrongly self-medicated himself.

One of my patients had excessive vomiting during her pregnancy for which she was prescribed an anti-vomiting drug. Her husband, who is banker by profession, bought the drug from one of the chemist shops in front of a hospital. He thought the drug was a little more expensive than it should have been and wanted a reconfirmation. The chemist reassured him that he had dispensed the prescribed drug. The husband was still unsatisfied and brought the drug and the prescription to me. This must be one of the horror stories, as the drug dispensed was a cytotoxic- used in cancer and a sure recipe for abortion. Here in our country, we have untrained and illiterate chemists who would gladly train small kids as future 'chemists' without any knowledge about drugs. This drug could have caused the loss of two lives through negligence of a dispensing chemist!

There are innumerable stories and anecdotes like this, in which people have caused serious damage to their health by taking inappropriate drugs through self-medication or suggested by their 'non-doctor' well-wishers or wrongly dispensed by the chemists. Pakistan is indeed a 'free' country and one is totally free to do anything especially when it comes to health and drugs. A ten years old boy can go and buy any drug without a question being asked. Every chemist shop has a senior person who usually looks after the 'money' part and many

young students, who are receiving on job training and handle all the dispensing.

Self-medication is a common malady and widely prevalent all over the world. This is understandable as well, as one cannot afford to rush to a doctor for minor ailments. But a very thick line has to be drawn where this self-liberty should end and give way to more 'common sense' and rational treatment. Most of us know that heart attack is caused by blockage of one of the tubes carrying blood to heart. This can be reopened by administration of clot dissolving drugs provided it is given within six hours. Heart attack may not present in its most classical form all the times. That is why there has never been a computer occupying a doctor's chair to diagnose various ailments. Many doctors and so called 'highly literate' people miss this window period because of self-diagnosis and even worse - self treatment.

Even a doctor should not be treating himself as it is aptly said that a 'fool' is treating an 'obstinate' patient. Most of the literate people who claim and unfortunately 'believe' that they know more than doctors are the worse of all. They even take the liberty of 'choosing' the 'correct' drugs prescribed by three doctors they had consulted in a single day for same complaints. The results of this mix and match can be very hazardous and many a times disastrous. Prescribing drugs by non-doctors to other people specially those who are poor and less literate may not only be 'illegal' and 'dangerous' but surely a 'sin' for which there should be no pardon.

Even an apparently harmless and commonly used drug may pose a life threatening situation in certain patients. Dispirin, a very commonly used drug, may cause ulcers in a patient who already has some problems in his stomach. Nitrate, a very commonly used drug in heart problems, can cause terrible headaches in many persons. Beta blockers, very commonly used drugs by physicians, psychiatrists, general practitioners and cardiologists, can cause serious breathlessness in patients with asthma and markedly reduce the heart rate in others.

All our drugs which have certain 'effects' are bound to have some 'side effects' as well. Drugs are like double edge swords and should be used by those who have been trained in handling them and who understand the whole background including

pharmacokinetics, dosage, effects, side effects and more importantly drug interactions. Interactions among drugs are a very important and ever expanding subject and this should strongly discourage our patients from 'mixing and matching' drugs from different prescriptions.

Even the consultants have problems in keeping abreast with ever increasing newly-discovered interactions because as new drugs are being marketed, more interactions are being discovered. A prescription of a doctor is like a final 'verdict' after listening to patient's complaints, clinical examination and all blood tests and other investigations. It has to be balanced and 'created' for that particular patient and may not be applicable to any one else! Therefore, just because a certain patient improved with a particular prescription, it must not be prescribed to every one else. Every individual needs a 'tailor made' prescription for his or her complaints or ailment.

Self-prescription is like committing suicide and prescribing drugs to others especially by non-doctors is like homicide. These are unpardonable offences both in the courts of law and more so common sense and social justice. Prescribing drugs is a very 'onerous, holy, respectable and major' responsibility and it should only be dealt by people who are trained and have invested their lives into it.

Prevention of Heart Problems and Islam

Heart diseases have emerged as a number one killer in both, the developing and developed countries. Though there has been a downward trend in the west in the prevalence of disease, it is on the rise in the developing conditions. Coronary artery disease follows a more aggressive course in the South East Asia. The disease occurs early and follows a rather malignant course. First heart attack occurs five years earlier in South East Asian population as compared to the western population. Occurrence of first heart attack before the age of 40 years is ten times higher in our population. Death rate across all age groups with heart disease is 40% higher. There is two fold excess of deaths in men before the age of 45years. Prevalence of heart disease before 40 years of age in the young in the West is less than 2% but is more than 12% in South Asians.

Many studies have been done to compare the risk factors attributing to more aggressive course and higher mortality in South East Asians. Diabetes is more common in our population and Pakistan spearheads the prevalence of diabetes in this region. Nearly 7.2% population has diabetes and this will increase to 8.7% by 2025. We have more smokers as compared to the western population. High blood pressure is as high as 52% in high income group in rural population in ages 45 to 65 years. In same age and social group prevalence of smoking was one in three and high cholesterol was 27%.

The disease is following a relentless course and its onslaught has to be checked. The treatment of all the different presentations of Coronary artery disease like angina, acute coronary syndrome, heart attack, heart failure and sudden death is very expensive and needs large resources. Even the affluent western societies have failed to ensure free treatment for all the cardiac disorders. Our salvage lies in the prevention of disease. We need to identify the risk factors and devise a strategy for primordial and primary prevention. Non modifiable risk factors like age, sex and family history determine the risk profile of a person and set the threshold for treatment. Modifiable risk factors like high blood pressure and cholesterol have to be controlled. Diabetes has to be controlled meticulously and aggressively. Smoking has to be discouraged and every effort has to be made to stop it. Obesity has to be controlled and exercise has to be encouraged.

Islam is a way of life and it offers great opportunities to positively modify these risk factors. The effects are multiple and fruits limitless in following the tenets of Islam. Obesity is being regarded as 'mother of all disease' and it is on the rise at a rapid rate. In Islam great emphasis has been laid on 'moderation' in every thing. Our Holy Prophet (PBUH) has shown us the Sirat-e-Mustaqeem in all fields. His advice of 'not filling stomach to brim' is an excellent guide·for all of us. His advice of dividing the stomach in three portions – first for solid, second for liquids and the third for gases – merits strict adherence. If one follows the way of life of our beloved Holy Prophet, no one will indulge in over eating and hence contain one's weight. What our holy Prophet practiced and showed to this world fourteen hundred years ago, science is proving it now. His diet is the best example of low cholesterol diet. He preferred goat milk and goat cheese which has very low cholesterol content. Olives were his favourite and today scientists have proven that olive oil has a very important protective role.

Ramazan Shareef is an example of self discipline - if one can remain functional without food for whole day long then decreasing the unwanted items of food cannot be difficult. If one does not indulge in 'devouring like a glutton' at Iftari one can easily lose unwanted inches of waist. Ramazan is an excellent training session and the better part should have been to apply

this 'restraint' in practical life. This 'acquired discipline' can become handy in following low cholesterol and caloric diet.

Doctors place a lot of emphasis on exercise. A person who walks five times a day to and fro from mosque indulges in light form of excise and can accumulate twenty to thirty minutes by taking little 'detours'. Our nimaz and wazoo are all parts of physical effort. Doctors recommend walking before meals. All our prayers are nicely timed before meals. Walk and exercise have been very nicely incorporated in our daily lives. People who are regular in prayers and offer them in the mosque, tend to remain healthy for longer years.

The West has very high rate of depression and suicide. Loneliness is the cause of most of their problems. They have invented the concept of clubs and social places like pubs. We already have that institution in the form of mosque and people can meet there five times a day. This forms a fraternity and if someone is absent for more than two prayers, fellow nimazis get worried and visit his house to enquire about his health. Elderly people find it a nice place to get together, discuss things and have an exchange of views. I strongly believe that if we follow the tenets of Islam in spirit we can prevent most of the problems and diseases including heart problems.

Latest research has shown the positive effects of meditation and positive feedback on health. The recovery after a heart attack is quicker in persons with positive outlook and adequate social support. The importance of 'Zikr' has been highlighted in recent observational studies. Not only that it offers relaxation, one also feels contented and has a sense of achievement. Repeating 'ayat or His exalted names' infuses new spirit in the body and sedates the restless soul. Nothing can have more tranquilising effect than Zikr and tasbeehat on the inner self.

Our salvation lies in holding tight to the rope of Islam and fortify our faith/Imaan. Following these very simple and basic principles, we can alter our future. Restraint in eating and proper selection and moderation in food, can have positive effect on cholesterol, blood pressure and obesity. Regular exercise can enhance the positive impact. Contentment and self satisfaction can change the outlook and improve the chances of avoiding heart problems. These measures can not only earn Jannat in the Aakhiraat but also the wealth of health in this life.

STOP THIS BUTCHERY!

"Whom should I blame I don't know! My life ended with my son, Nafees. My twenty-year-old boy was very handsome and enjoyed extremely good health, till he started treatment from a health centre across the road. The man before me was narrating his sad tale with tears in his eyes. Apparently his son, who had passed his matric examination and was preparing to enter college, had some allergic problem and vague complaints for which he contacted a 'wise' friend, who referred him to this particular health centre with a fancy name - 'Foladi Health Centre'. He was given some medicines, which were supposed to make him 'strong like a bull'. Only God knows what was in those tablets. Within twenty days the young boy breathed his last, succumbing to the callousness of a totally untrained twit.

"My niece was pregnant and went to a 'compounder' in the village. He gave her some medicines, and she nearly lost her life following an abortion and massive bleeding," Bibi Saeeda told me when she visited me at the hospital.

Haseeb, a bank executive, had a similar tale to narrate when I visited his house to condole his father's demise. "My father had pain in his chest for the last three days. He visited the local hakim and a dispenser seven times, but was reassured each time that it was nothing but gas," he told me. Unfortunately, it later proved, those 'gases', were in fact the signs of a heart attack, but

the symptoms were not recognised by these self-styled healers (and dealers).

These are isolated anecdotes, hundreds of similar episodes are related to properly trained and qualified doctors all around the country. Here we are in the twenty-first century, and should be devising a system to make doctors accountable for their decisions and acts of negligence in hospitals and in private practice. Instead, we are allowing illiterate people who have no training whatsoever to play havoc with the health of our people. There is a criminal silence from the authorities regarding the free hand given to dispensers, health visitors, hakims and above all the self-proclaimed healer who operate from 'health centres'. For God's sake there has to be some rule, some authority somewhere to prevent people from prescribing medication and playing with lives.

These 'wise men' are multiplying by the hundred, as people with no medical training say to themselves, "If other persons can fool so many people, why can't I? After all I have a smooth tongue and a good academic background," which probably means the individual concerned failed twice in class six before quiting school. We will have thousands of these 'health men' throughout the country, earning their livelihood with a smooth tongue and deception. The people who are good for nothing and could not make it even to a high school, take up this profession of medicine, uncurbed by any authority. This is one career which, it seems, needs no education and no training. All it requires is a sacrifice of conscience at the altar of economic gain.

The most unfortunate part of the tale is that these crafty individuals utilise allopathic drugs and tablets, which are dispensed in a most unhygienic manner, disguised in different ways. They do not have a clue what they are prescribing to other people. They know nothing about the bio-chemistry, indications, side effects and possible interactions with other drugs. Indeed, they are very brave and who have no fear of the law (if there is a law somewhere). We, even as specialists, think many a time before prescribing anything. They write score of drugs in one prescription. Unwittingly, they may be blocking the effects of some drug, while at the same time stimulating it with other drugs (ignorance is bliss!). Undoubtedly, we have extremely resilient and tough patient who can survive all these medical

cocktails. Indeed, less robust individuals would have departed long ago for heaven or hell, whatever their deeds on earth earned for them.

The other day I saw a prescription bearing across the letter head a name with titles like 'maulvi', 'hakim', rather 'haziq hakim', 'dispenser' and 'practitioner' pre-fixed to it. The letter head also stated that the person was the son of so and so ex-doctor, and he had used the letter head to prescribe in Urdu a number of allopathic drugs. I was amazed, no I was flabbergasted, by this gentleman's guts. But in my heart of heart I felt a little reassured that at least the patient was to get something well-tested and tried. Just imagine what other not so fortunate patients will be getting from health centres and hakims!

I have a firm belief that these people are actually on the payroll of the population controlling (or elimination) department; on realising that the chances of success are pretty slim, the department has employed these thugs to achieve their worth aim. These health practitioners seem convinced that our country can only progress if its population can be contained. Motivated by patriotic zeal, they have waged a war against the people and care little about who comes within their firing range. Many bread winners and young innocents alike have succumbed to their brutal ways.

Allowing someone to practice is like issuing a licence - and the authorities have to be very cautious about it, far more than when issuing an arms licence. We cannot afford to have half trained pilots to fly our aeroplanes and half-cooked drivers to drive us around, so how can we have totally untrained and uneducated people taking care of our health? There is no justification at all for this state of affairs, as there are thousands of medical graduates who are unemployed, and with a bit of planning, everyone in the county could be offered safe medical cover.

How can we allow this state of affairs to carry on? Our brothers and sisters are the target of the greed, illiteracy and dearth of knowledge of these illegal practitioners. This is criminal, and it should be declared a heinous crime, punishable in the severest, possible way. If someone loses one's life, the

quack should be taken to the court and once his guilt is proved, he should be charged with murder and punished as such.

There should be very strict regulations governing medical practice, which must be restricted only to those who are properly qualified and trained. As is the case in other countries, even foreign graduates must not be allowed to practice unless they have satisfied the local authorities as to their competence to practise medicine safely and with responsibility

Mobile – Love it or Hate it

MOBILE - YOUR BEST FRIEND?

Very few things had such a profound effect on our lives as mobile technology! It has changed our norms and has had far reaching effects on our culture and traditions. The ripples are being felt right from the mosque to school, from air travel to jogging, and from hospital to home. The way birthdays are celebrated, the way death is announced and the way help is sought in emergency - all have transformed. One day an unknown person entered my clinic and handed over a mobile phone, perplexed and not knowing what to do, I put it to my ears and there was some one I knew very well on the other side asking for a favour - no chance to refuse. Even the way the 'sifarish' is made and conveyed has, also, undergone major reform.

Gone are the days when a person was known by the company he kept! Now the person is known by the mobile one carries! The choice of mobile determines the person's taste and attitude towards life besides one's maturity. Just as the true personality is hidden in the socks of a person, similarly the true personality of a person is revealed in the tones the mobile sings on announcing the call. A cheap song reveals the true mentality, loud music unveils the loud and extrovert nature, where as quiet and discreet signal shows the maturity of a person. The way one handles the mobile reflects the character of the person.

The mobile technology has changed the norms of business and has removed that element of mystery and hiding behind the veil

of inaccessibility. This has also changed the way business is carried out! Suddenly every one has become accessible! The cobbler has the mobile phone and so does the barber. The carpenter boasts of the mobile and the electrician is no exception. The technology has ensured rapid 'connectivity' for good or for bad. If one wants something, it can all be organised on mobile. Say 'hello' and the job is accomplished.

Social practices have changed a lot! Previously people used to ring bells to get the door opened; now they ring on mobile. Finding the driver used to be an uphill task in a large function, no problem give him a call on mobile. 'Credit conscious' people, rather opt for a missed call. Keeping a track on children was quite difficult, now give them a mobile and they are being tracked by a satellite. The sounds coming from the surrounding tell the whole story!

The 'curse' of remembering numbers and dialing is all over. Many people do not even remember their own or children's phone numbers. Now is the time to search the name and order the mobile to dial. Details of contacts can be stored in a much organised way. Addresses of office and residence besides email and web can be stored and retrieved in different ways. If one requires contacting relatives, one just has to change the folder. If one is entering the secretariat, open the relevant folder and one is on the target. If in an emergency, the most useful tool is mobile and it has proven to be 'life saving' in many situations. If one plans a meeting of the staff, draft an SMS and copy to all the employees in the folder and the job is done in seconds.

The addition of camera has found new uses for the phone. Though the intended use was for capturing important occasions of life, it has been used as a 'witness' as well! Recently there had been extensive use of the 'recording technology' in the senate elections. Moments can be frozen and recorded on memory and can be transmitted anywhere. Events get relayed a lot faster now a day. Birthday pictures reach across the Atlantic before the original prints are received on paper. On many occasions, in the absence of a proper camera, these mobile become very handy and useful.

Personal digital assistant (PDA) is extremely helpful in organising a person's life. The addition of PDA technology and

recording of appointments armed with alarms obviate the need for a secretary. Lining up all appointments plus taking care of important 'things to do' can organize a person's life. It can organise appointments as personal, business or social beside other categories. It can ring the alarms well in advance and the alarm can be different for different types of appointments-personal versus business. Three alarms on the mobile are more than enough to take one through the day. One can programme the reminders and early alarms to one's convenience. There are mobiles equipped with alarms for five prayers plus a compass for the Qibla. The phone has taken the responsibility of the personal servant to remind one of the important appointments.

Connectivity with computer makes life so easy, down load the contacts using wireless technology like infra red or blue tooth and one has all the information. Files in 'Word' can be downloaded on the mobile and used in meetings. Even slides on power point can be downloaded on the mobile and can be projected on multi media. Articles or memos can be written on mobile and can be transferred on to computer. Notes can be taken in memos and even free hand drawings can be recorded in the original form on the mobile and later saved on the computer.

MP3 technology has further enhanced the usage of the mobile. Now, people store in what ever they want to hear! And when there is no one to talk to, they tune to their favourite performer. Many people use it for storing music; some use it for old classical songs and the younger lot store in mind boggling pop music. Religious people have found a unique use, as they can store Quran Shareef and play it as they perform their daily chores.

If one is in the middle of something and is reminded of something important, what to do? Just record it on the 'Voice recorder'. One is attending an important lecture and that too can become a part of the history by storing it on mobile memory. The child sings a song or narrates a story for the first time; all that can be recorded and further down loaded on the computer. It can also be used as evidence by recording and then playing it at the appropriate time.

Messaging is being used more extensively especially among younger and literate people. My biggest complaint against messaging is that it has spoiled our language. It has given birth

to a new language which is neither English nor Urdu. Many write Urdu in English along with the slang. Many abbreviations have been invented and interestingly and surprisingly it is understood and written the same way all over the world. Many new words and 'expressions' are being added every day. In older days there were movies reserved for adults, now the adolescents have a language rich in expression which we the adults find difficult to decipher and are not supposed to know about it.

Almost all mobiles are loaded with games and people keep themselves busy playing these games. There are people who cannot go to sleep till they have played a couple of games. Some of the experts keep practicing, to improve their scores. The games are so addicting that people keep playing with their mobile even when they should be busy somewhere else.

Going on internet and receiving emails had never been so easy and convenient. One can browse the net and 'receive and store' the necessary information on mobile phones. It needs a bit of time and practice to get used to a small screen but then it becomes very handy and convenient. With new key boards and 'human ingenuity', typing has become easier. Same technology can be hooked to a laptop and one can be 'in touch' regardless of position and local facilities. One can literally carry the office around in the shape of a mobile and function effectively regardless of the location.

The effects it has on education will be far reaching and may turn out to be devastating. The concentration of students has reduced as many back benchers are busy messaging, ringing up people or sharing jokes during lecture. Messaging in the class has become the in thing! Any new incidence or joke is shared in the clan and spreads like a fire in the jungle. Mobile technology has taken children away from their studies, the only use it has in academic world is to use it as a 'carrot'! It has become the most cherished reward but the main problem is that the demand keeps changing with the introduction of newer models and technology. The new trend of using it in 'UFM' unfair means - is becoming popular. No need of making 'booties' or taking books, down load the 'stuff' on PDF file and it is ready to 'copy and paste'.

The mobile technology had been a wonderful concept and it has transcended all barriers of age, education and class. It has become a necessity of life and for many the life is incomplete without mobile. For some it's a source of earning and for others it may be a source of enjoyment. It has permeated to all the strata of society and every one is enjoying the fruits of technology according to one's own intellect, requirements and expertes!

Mobiles in Medicine

"Doctor, I have been waiting for more than for two hours, more over I had booked the appointment a week in advance.....," the opening sentence was rudely interrupted by the musical tone of his mobile phone. After an initial hello he seemed to lose the track of what he was telling me and got grossly involved in the conversation. And, I was wondering that here is a gentleman who had waited for the appointment for so long and traveled two hundred miles for it but now at the 'peak' of everything his 'mobile etiquettes' are wasting his and more importantly other patients' time. Many patients carry their mobile with them to the clinic and in their 'simplicity' do not deter from engaging into long conversation with their kith and kin, relating long story of the long arduous journey and unwanted prolonged agony of waiting for the appointment.

'The patient has severe coronary artery disease and might require angioplasty...;" I start to explain the diagnosis and the plan to the patient's relative having examined the patient and going through the clinical tests. Suddenly his mobile starts playing Mozart and he transcends into a new world - chatting and giggling. He becomes totally oblivious of the surrounding and the trauma he is causing to me and the time he is wasting of every one else. I look at him in disgust and wonder that is he the same person who took one week leave from Dubai to accompany his ailing aged father and be examined by me? And

now when the 'real time' has arrived, he is busy with his mobile and chatting about some worthless thing.

Coronary Care Unit (CCU) and Intensive Care Unit (ICU) are very sacred areas, where normally people do not dare to talk loudly. This is the place where even the medics whisper and refrain from shouting. Many patients' relatives recharge their mobile phones using the electric outlets reserved for life saving machinery. On receiving calls they answer loudly and some times if the line is bad they do not mind talking on the top of their voice. They can not care less if this disturbs the sanctity of the milieu and has harmful effects on other patients! One can appreciate that the relatives and friends may be genuinely worried about the patient's well being but that does not justify the use of mobile in sacred places like CCU and ICU. Very few people appreciate that use of mobile interfere in our monitoring system and this can have serious effects on patient care. Abroad, people are not allowed to use mobile phone in the buildings of hospital and people abide by the rules!

The curse of mobile has invaded the medical community as well! During a formal ward round doctors and nurses take notes of the decisions made and the orders to be carried out. Lately our young house officers boasting of latest mobile and newer ring tones have their mobile phones ringing during the ward rounds. On every second bed either a house officer or a medical officer has an 'important call' to attend to. Once we had banned the use of mobile phones during the ward round, next day it was the charge nurse's phone playing havoc and causing disturbance. A patient may be serious and wanting urgent attention but the doctor or nurse may be lost in a different world busy talking on mobile phone.

Most of the medical meetings used to start with recitation from holy Quran – not any more! Now, before any meeting the audience has to be requested to put off the mobile phones. Very few comply and that too grudgingly! In our hospital in journal clubs and clinico-pathological meetings the proceedings are interrupted by the mobile rings. Worse scenario is people attending to the calls. Many doctors would sneak out to attend the call but many more will not hesitate to answer the phones from their seats. The disturbance it causes can be well imagined.

The first request in our medical courses is 'absolute switching' off of mobile phones and no 'silent mode' joke. This is seconded by the argument that if they cannot afford to switch off their mobiles, they may as well leave the course. Courses require utmost attention and continuity, the chain is easily broken down and that can lose all its impact. All the participants have to be involved in the course physically and mentally. A live mobile, some how or the other, remains a big distracter especially while receiving and sending messages.

To every dark side is a brighter side! For a change every doctor regardless of being a house officer or a medical officer are now traceable. The 'excuses' of the past do not work any more! If the person is late or absent from the duty, dial his number and know his exact location! You want to call an urgent meeting send SMS to every one and hopefully every one will be there! Going through the hospital exchange can be a time consuming process and then no one may pick up the phone in the ward. No problem, ring up the desirable mobile and get the update on the progress of the patient. If you want to check on the progress of a patient ring up the doctor or patient's attendant.

If one is facing a problem in the operation theatre or in the Cardiac Catheterization laboratory and a second opinion is required, ring up the wanted person and get the problem solved on urgent basis there and then. Messaging perhaps is more convenient and discreet. One can be issuing instructions and keeping one self updated without disturbing people around. If a good job has been done by the team, a congratulatory SMS can be sent to all the team members. Every one has become accessible unless they put their mobiles off or feign not to hear the incoming voice. This system works better than the more established 'bleep' system which depends heavily on a very reliable internal phone system.

Our medical consults have also become easier! If a call has to be sent to nephrology, and the doctor is not available on his extension, ring up his mobile number and inform him about the call. This can become life saving in many situations. Situations, during which a doctor is not traceable or available on phone, like while traveling, walking from place A to B or in our out patient department. Every one has become accessible and available! Opinions can be sought from the experts from all over

the country and abroad either by SMS, or still better using pictures and videos employing MMS in seconds.

Though mobile technology has proliferated among all the ranks of our medical system and it has solved multiple problems, yet it has created some new 'diseases' as well. We as a nation have not learnt the 'mobile etiquettes', we do not recognize that the there is some thing as silent mode and moreover there are some places where the mobile has to be put off! But surely the mobile technology can be employed positively for the betterment of the patients. Mobile technology can be used and can ensure the availability and accessibility of all medical staff. This can be very effective tool for communication for consultation at local and international levels.

CURSE OF MOBILE PHONE IN HARMAIN SHAREEFAIN

Eventually the luck favoured us and a queue was formed just before Asr prayers to kiss the Hijr-e-Aswad. Soaked in emotions and thanking our stars for the good luck, we were impatiently waiting for our turn. Who could have been luckier than us, as we stood close to Khana-i-Kaaba - literally touching it and approaching 'the souvenir of Heaven'? Suddenly the mobile phone of the person ahead of me plays a cheap musical tune and the person starts talking to someone in his native language at the top of his voice. While talking, he forgets about the sanctity of the place and becomes oblivious of the holiness of the surrounding. This, he continues till he is told off by the guard!

Everyone, who rears the flame of love and respect for Khana-i-Kaaba experiences 'an out of this world' feeling during Tawwaf. As one is supplicating and feels that the prayers are being answered, musical tones of mobile phones disturb beyond any limits. Worse still are the people, who answer the calls, and talk loudly about the worldly things and disturb all around them. They destroy the concentration of others who are solemnly involved in praying. To be in that holy surrounding and then to be a part of the most blessed ones who are in Tawwaf is the epitome of good luck. In that situation, if someone deprives you of the bliss and the fortitude it offers, it is undoubtedly most condemnable act.

During almost every congregation of prayer, the solemnity and sanctity is literally tattered down by the repugnant mobile rings. All of them sound bad to ears but worse are the musical tones and still worse are the songs. The annoyance they cause reduces one's concentration and takes one away from the pious surroundings. Similar tones are heard during Janaza prayers that follow regular prayers in Haram Shareef. To make things worse some people do not put off their mobiles during the prayers, letting it play for quite some time which seems like ages. Perhaps they consider putting off mobile phones against the norms of prayers but what about ruining everyone else's prayers?

All the 'Shurtas' and other staff deputed in Haram Shareef now carry mobile phones. Many of them are busy conversing in loud voice coupled with manual gestures regardless of the sacredness of the place. Many a times, they are seen engrossed in their toys totally oblivious of their surroundings. While waiting for Maghrib prayers in the front row near Rukn-e-Yamani it was quite distressing to watch a particular 'shurta' in uniform sharing his text message with all his colleagues. They would all burst in laughter on seeing the text which I guess must be a joke! Their casual attitude along with bursts of guffaws was quite irritating and distracting.

Even Masjid-i-Nabvi is no exception to the misuse of mobile technology. During prayers abhorable musical tones are heard from different corners. People do no consider it as 'bad manners' to answer a call in Haram Shareef or worse to call someone and engage in lengthy conversation, regardless of its impact on others. Still more annoying is when they break into laughter on sharing a joke. Some people do not think twice before using foul language, as per habit, in such holy ambience. Mobile technology or more appropriately the misuse of the technology creates much annoyance and exasperation among the people busy in Ibadat as it defies the holy atmosphere and distracts the concentration.

Maulana Makki is a well respected figure in Haram Shareef whose Dars-e-Quran are attended by a lot of people after Maghrib prayers. He takes questions at the end of his sermon. Answering a question relating to mobiles, his answer had arguments which were based on logic. His point was, that

instead of official ban and use of jammers, the public by and large should act responsibly and refrain from bringing mobiles to Haram Shareef. And even if someone brings a mobile, he must not use it in Haram Shareef. Even someone has an important call to attend to, he should leave the Haram Shareef, to attend the call as one would normally do, during an important meeting. Can there be any other meeting more important and sacred than this meeting with Allah Subhanahu Taala? As someone has put it very nicely, that this is the place for 'direct dialing' to Allah Subhanahu Taala and fortify relationships with Him and not to waste time on mobile phones.

Though most of us have acquired this new toy in the form of mobile, we have not learnt the etiquette of using it properly and judiciously. Unfortunately mobile transcends a person from his surroundings to a different environment. The transition is rather abrupt and one does not realise the evolution. One may not appreciate the significant consequences it has on the ambiance and the people in surrounding. One never realises that the surrounding has not changed and he has to comply with the demands of the present situation.

Mobile phones have a direct and profound effect on our daily life and our religious obligations. Though on the one hand it can work as reminder for prayers, compass for determination of Qibla and can store Tilawat in MP3 technology yet the indiscriminate use has the most detrimental effects during prayers or in any sacred place. Of course no technology is good or bad; it is the way it is used.

Indiscriminate and random use leads to a lot of problems and has serious consequences for all. In most of the mosques in Europe jammers have been installed which forbid the use of mobiles in that surrounding. Whereas similar technology may be used at least in the most sacred of the sacred places like Harmain Shareefain to disallow the use of mobile phones even if someone carries the phone inside by mistake yet the ban should come from inside. We should exercise utmost care and caution in using the new technology and must ensure to safeguard the sanctity of the place and situation. As we are not allowed to use the mobile during important meetings and are forbidden to use in so-called important places like Governor House or Chief Minister House similarly in the House of Allah Almighty we must not use the mobile, not out of coercion but out of reverence and love.

MOBILE ETIQUETTE

With heavy hearts every one had lined up for the Nimaz Janaza of a young man. The environment was lugubrious as he died in his youth. In that somber atmosphere, as soon as the prayer started, mobile phone of a person standing next to me started playing the latest song. The person deemed it inappropriate to move and put off the mobile. The sound of Maulana could not be heard because of the music. It seemed very ironical that although we had all gathered to share the loss with the relatives, yet we were singing songs. It was indeed insulting! The man was quite right to say that making gestures and moving is strictly prohibited in Nimaz but by not putting off the mobile he caused irreparable damage and inflicted profound trauma to the bereaved family!

Most of the mosques have put on the sign declaring the use of mobiles as prohibited. During congregation sound of a mobile phone can be very annoying, besides being distracting. The worse part of the story is to allow it to continue! And the worst part of it is that the tones have become melodious and many people down load songs from internet. It may sound good to ears at other times but during Nimaz, it's a trauma. Currently after Iqamat the Maulana normally asks the followers to fall in straight lines, but very shortly its going to become the norm to formally announce to turn off the mobile before prayers. It will virtually become an integral part of prayer rituals.

Though the sound of mobile is annoying in any serious ambiance it's more so in meetings and seminars. Most of the meetings used to start with Tilawat – not any more! They all start with a very humble request from the organizers to switch off the mobiles. Needless to say all such requests fall on deaf ears! A wonderful lecture can get ruined and become a laughing stock just because of one call on mobile phone. The other day, a very interesting lecture by a senior and well respected doctor, lost all attention by the audience as mobile of a participating doctor started ringing. He, without leaving his seat, tried to convince the other party rather loudly that it was not an appropriate time to answer as he was in an important meeting. The damage was done and it took quite a long time to develop the same concentration by the speaker and the audience!

As we were drowned in emotion and busy in supplication in Khana Kaaba, some one's mobile started ringing! Guess what, he answered the phone and did it in a style while performing Tawaf. He may be a regular visitor and hence it may be a routine for him but for us and our children it was like a big shock. People praying in Haram do not routinely put off their mobiles. One finds many Arabs busy talking on their mobiles in Haram Sharif. Mobile phones keep ringing during prayers but unlike us our Arab brethren are prompt to switch it off while praying. Young and old, all carry mobile and use it extravagantly.

Ward rounds are considered a very serious business and are conducted in a most disciplined fashion like a parade in army. During one of the rounds we had mobiles ringing up one after the other disrupting the round. Every house officer and medical officer was carrying a mobile but when all the doctors had put their mobiles off, it was a nurse's mobile which started singing songs. Now, before I start the round a formal announcement like the one performed by an aircraft's pilot is made with an 'order' to put off the mobile. Even in a somber place like CCU where we have serious patients mobiles keep ringing. People attending to their mobiles have no regard for the serious patients. Worse scenario is when the reception is not optimal and people start shouting. Of course its common knowledge that mobiles disrupt communications and patient monitoring system! Hence the use of mobiles cannot be justified under any circumstances by anyone in CCU.

In good old times, one could befriend fellow travelers while traveling by indulging in conversation. No more - we were traveling between Venice and Rome by train and every one was talking but alas not to each other but to some one else far away on mobile. I also found it very disturbing as all my attempts to catch on my sleep were foiled by the mobile technology. If in one corner a lady was laughing her head out, in another corner the man was telling off some one in a very serious tone, in yet another corner a young girl was giggling and laughing, yet another person was finding it hard to hear the conversation hence kept shouting at the top his voice. It was sheer madness and I concluded that it may have some good points but for peace and tranquility, mobile technology was a curse!

Only God knows how many people have lost their lives because of mobile. As we lack strict self control and civic sense has yet to develop, we use mobiles while driving. In UK it has been banned and is punished with heavy fines. In USA it's considered as a 'heinous' crime. In most of the Europe, mobile phone use is banned while driving. The use of mobile phone and engaging in conversation can easily distract and be a source of losing concentration on road. By doing this one does not only endanger one's own life but put other lives at risk. A simple error of judgment can prove fatal. Use of mobile phone should be absolutely banned while driving.

We have a new technology in our hands and it has it has its plus points but we have to know how to use it and when to use it. The mere knowledge is not enough we have it to practice. We have only recently been able to 'look down upon' smoking and now normally a smoker will ask for permission before smoking. The liberty of smoking 'anywhere and every where' is gone. Similarly we have to develop a code of conduct for the use of mobile phone and then practice it as well!

And Now the Blue Tooth!

This was business class lounge at Dubai, perhaps one of the biggest in the world and undoubtedly the most generous in the world in terms of variety of food and facilities. The gentleman was talking to me and looking straight into my eyes. I scratched my hard disk –brain both the RAM and non RAM and I could swear that I had never seen him in my life before. As he approached nearer, I realized he was not talking in any of the languages that I understood. Who is he? Could he be one of my co-workers from UK? The brain went for another search and again the answer was, 'don't know!' His mannerism was a little queer to my comfort. Is he talking on a mobile and I looked at his hands but he was holding a plate with both hands! Again wrong guess, I tell myself! Suddenly as he turned towards right side, I had a good laugh at myself. He had the newest innovation, the partner of mobile technology 'blue tooth' adapter attached to his right ear. It was so small that one could hardly see it. Blue tooth ear set has further increased the confusion, which mobile technology has already created!

The person in the front car seemed to be talking and often throwing his hands up and down. I looked for the passengers in the car and found none. I got a little close to him and no, he was not even holding the mobile. I had become a little curious so I enhanced my speed and tried to cross him. While over taking him I turned my neck almost at ninety degrees looking at him suspiciously. No, I checked his both ears and he was not even

wearing blue tooth devices. "He must be insane, if it is so, is he safe on the road or more importantly are we all safe while he is on the road?" I asked myself. A little later I realized that he was driving a new Honda Accord fitted with hands free equipment that allows one to talk and hear the other party's voice on the loud speaker. All the time, the gentleman was talking to someone on the mobile and causing all the confusion for people around him!

Remember the advertisement, where a young pretty girl is talking to someone on a small mobile phone! The people around considered the luck to be on their side as the lady seemed to be attracting their attention; where as she was busy talking to some one else somewhere far away! Things have progressed a lot, as the advances in mobile technology have lead to smaller phone sets. Far beyond that even the size has become irrelevant, as phone can be ten feet away locked up in the drawer or glove compartment and one can be on air on the wings of new technology – blue tooth technology.

Blue tooth technology –regardless of its name has nothing to do with being blue or having a tooth. This technology allows the mobile phone set to establish connection with a hearing set or a computer without any wire or infra red rays. Which implies that the set may be anywhere in the reach and the calls can be transferred to the hearing set. It's a big step forward and eases of the operation of the mobile phone rendering both hands free to carry on working. Perhaps its best usage is while driving or working at home or working on computer. This might be of great advantage as this can reduce the mobile thefts.

If one is talking to air and throwing one's hands in air in disgust or enthusiasm, he may be in the middle of a hot arguments and who knows an important conversation. He may be striking and finalizing a deal worth millions. If he or she is making romantic gestures that may not be for the audience but for the beloved -on the other end of the mobile. Big caution mark – do not pass judgment on anyone's mental status unless the person has been searched for all the modern technology. The person labeled as schizophrenic for ideas of grandeur, auditory hallucination and talking to himself, may actually be talking to some high brow and actually communicating on blue tooth technology.

Mobile technology has had profound effects on social life and structure. It has opened new vistas in our life. Many rights have become wrong and many wrongs have become right. It has changed our way of life. So next time when you see some one looking at you, seemingly talking to you but not actually talking to you- take it easy! Your first guess may be correct, he may be actually conversing with some one else. There was a time when any one seen talking to oneself would have been labeled as 'not mentally sound'. Mental institutes and psychiatry units were monitored for people talking to themselves. Things perhaps have changed in the opposite direction, now it is marked as a sign of high tech and prosperity. Psychiatrists have to revise their diagnostic tools and redefine the ailments putting in cautionary commands like to exclude the possibility of mobile technology and blue tooth before making a diagnosis.

THE PILLARS OF LOVE

AGHA JI – THE SPRING OF LOVE

Not a day passes by,
Without making me realise the reality
The reality that the ones I loved the most
Are not here to wipe
The everlasting mist that drowns these eyes
Yet with every beat another reality dawns
The reality that they are adored and thought about
Every time a smile forms across this face
They live in me… with me… for me forever

(Wahaj Aman)

There are very few people in life who are blessed with unlimited stores of love and affection. They have infinite capacity and are always ready to spend it lavishly on others. They are the perennial sources of kindness and compassion. And they are the reason for humanity to prosper and thrive. Aghaji, undoubtedly belonged to that special and privileged group of individuals. He was the most loving person that one could ever come across. He was so full of love that anyyone who came close to him would be infected by his smile and bitten by his sincerity.

Aghaji's lips were always adorned with a smile. His eyes embellished with unadulterated affection. His handshake was firm but full of genuineness and fondness. His warm hug used to convey warmth and benevolence. He addressed everyone

with kindheartedness and consideration. His mannerism irradiated love and all those in contact would become his fans.

For his children, the love was infinite and all four of us thought that every one was the major 'share holder' of it. Intoxicated by his adoration we were all spoiled to the extreme limits. Though we had our hearts full of veneration and esteem for him, the adulation we received for him was boundless.

My sister being the eldest and the only daughter was perhaps his most favourite. As one enters her house, the first picture one comes across is that of Aghaji. During my sister's one year house job we used to visit her daily and had our dinner over there. After her marriage, hardly a week would pass when he would not be rushing to Islamabad to visit her. Her life was devastated after his death and I can still feel a big void in her life without him. Aghaji had very cordial relationship with her children and they all heard their first Azaan in his voice and learnt the first few words from his mouth. The eldest son Raza was favourite to us all being the first kid of the family but he was closest to Aghaji. Behram and Sohrab can still feel the warmth of his love in them.

Sanaullah felt that Aghaji was and remains his best friend. My brother has not been able to find a replacement for him and gets restless as the month of June starts. It amazes me that they could talk for hours. They enjoyed each others' company and had a lot in common. They drew the plans for the future together and would be in constant contact. Sundas, the eldest daughter was his special friend. Sanaullah chose his son's name to rhyme with Aghaji. May be he is still looking for that strong bond that he had with him. Their bond had grown much stronger as Aghaji visited him in Dubai and stayed with him for some time.

As the elder two of us left for abroad after our graduation, Amer was the only one left to enjoy all the love he had to offer. They had fantastic understanding and Amer used to accompany him in most of his trips. Being the last child Aghaji was perhaps most intimate and close to him. Aghaji's heart would beat with his and he wanted to fulfill all his wishes through him. He has the maximum resemblance to Aghaji physically and has taken up most his habits intuitively. He is called 'Chota Aghaji' by my paternal aunts who probably could see Aghaji's image in him.

My son owes his entire childhood grooming to him. Together they would explore the natural beauty in trees and shrubs. He learnt his earlier vocabulary to him. Their mutual love was out of this world as Wahaj would be waiting for him to come back and take him out. And Aghaji's biggest pleasure used to be to spend time with him. Wahaj enjoyed operating electrical buttons and Aghaji made a large board of buttons. Though Aghaji said goodbye to this ephemeral abode when he was only two and half years but he can feel the strength of that everlasting love and therefore can express it forcefully in his poems.

Aghaji had most profound love for his only brother whom he loved the most Their bond was very strong and their lives revolved around each other. Aghaji looked after him like his own son. As they lost their father at a very early age Aghaji assumed the role of a 'father' very early. But as they struggled through their childhood their mutual love and bond became stronger. Under the vigilant eye of Amma Jan - their mother they all grew in a very disciplined and controlled environment.

It was 27th of Ramazan that after the Taraveeh prayers he wanted to go to see his eldest sister 'Baji Gul'. I wanted to talk him out of it as he was an 'early to bed and early to rise' sort of a man. The driver was not available so he went on his own. He returned quite late and later it revealed that he had gone for the 'rishta' of his nephew. Aghaji was very close to his sisters and very genuinely worried about their children - their academics and their brought up. He helped most of his nephews with their careers and his doors were always open for all of them. All of them enjoyed special amiable relationship with him and satisfied their thirst of love from this ever-flowing spring of love.

Aghaji used to visit his parents' graves regularly. He used to take small kids from the mosque and recite the Holy Quran over there. He was a most dedicated son and even when he was very busy, he would always find time to visit them. He was most distressed when he lost his mother and would have tears rolling down his cheeks, remembering his parents.

Many of the people who worked with him in police or intelligence bureau are full of respect and shower their praises lavishly. They talk about him with fondness and admiration remembering the love he showered upon them in good old days.

We as his children have been the recipient of their profound kindness and are most grateful to them for that. Everyday in the hospital or in the clinic I have people addressing me as 'nephew', as they enjoyed 'brotherly' relationships with him in yesteryear.

He never forgot his friends of football days and would visit them regularly. The neighbours of his family house used to feel proud of him and he never let them down. He used to make it a point to visit his old friends and look after their families. Many of his friends are in close contact with us and we can feel their affection and warmth.

Though there is a lot more to be said but I wish to conclude on this very nice small poem which perhaps expresses a lot that is unsaid:

You can shed tears that he is gone
Or you can smile that he has lived
You can close your eyes and pray that he will come back
Or you can open your eyes and see all that he has left
Your heart can be empty, that you can't see him
Or you can be full of the love that you shared
You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday
Or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday
You can remember him only and that he is gone
Or you can cherish his memory and let it live on
You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back
Or you can what he would want; smile, open your eyes, love and go on

THE ANGEL OF LIFE - PROF ZAKIA MINHAS

When I was in final year MBBS, some twenty five years ago, I wrote a poem titled 'Zakia Minhas's smile'. Though the lyrics are lost in air but the spirit is still there. This was the time when my only bond with her was that of a student to a teacher. Now over the years we have developed many bonds, many of them unnamed and 'not specified' but undoubtedly very strong that have stood with all the tests of time. Sure enough, I become restless, if I do not see her for a few days! This 'iron lady' who was very tough with her subordinates and knew very well how to discipline her house staff, always had a broad smile to offer to all her patients. I remember very fondly that she would be telling us off as students for not reaching up to her expectations (which were always very high!) but as she would turn to her patient her face would melt down and she would start smiling. This revealed her inner love and kind heartedness for her patients which is and was a glowing example for all of us. The poem went something like this:

Zakia's Smile

When sighs arise from every lip,
Signifying the distress,
One is undergoing,
Someone really estimable,

Concealing all her agonies,
She has undergone,
Bequeath upon everyone,
Her life bestowing smile,
Her teeth shining behind lips,
As a moon shines behind clouds,
Her smile creates,
A new zeal in dying souls,
Urges them to live,
Embellish their eyes with joy,
It appears to me,
This is the spring
Which Khizr had discovered,
That confer upon people,
A long happy smile

"There is only one 'Mard' among all the doctors and that happens to be Prof Zakia Minhas," the undisputed strongest Governor and Chief Minister of NWFP Gen Fazal Haq used to often reiterate. He was very fond of her and was very impressed with her administrative capabilities. It was during his times that she was appointed as the administrator of Khyber teaching hospital. The hospital became cleaner, doctors and nurses became punctual, the nursing call system started working and poor patients started getting medicines.

She lead by example, she would start her ward round at six thirty in the morning and would be available in her office till late. Any one could go up to her with a complaint and the problem would be solved there and then. The hospital store was in an absolute mess when she took over, but became respondent to the demands of the wards and patients in her time. The corridors used to shine, the hospital used to sparkle with cleaner white bed sheets and the place became well known for its friendlier atmosphere.

She is one person who knows the meanings for 'friendship' in letter and spirit. She is a great believer in upholding the sanctity and strength of 'relationship' and she very generously invests her love and time in these relationships without any regard for return. She has friends who are willing to sacrifice any thing for

her because she has the same feelings for them. She has the 'most loyal' friends not only in Pakistan but spread all over the world. With her genuine sincerity and unlimited love, she endears anyone who comes in close contact with her. Once she ties the bond of friendship with anyone, she would hold that relationship for the rest of times.

Once she presented my wife a bell with an inscription 'I will be there when ever you need me'. This could never be truer and she proved that during our times of stress. She was most concerned about our well being and would be the first person to call us every day without fail and made sure that we are looked after properly even in a foreign land. We had an old frail English lady visit us in London with flowers as she was 'ordered' from Peshawar to present them to us. That nice lady visited us many times to enquire about us and perhaps report back to Prof Zakia Minhas about our well being.

Many doctors owe their careers to her. She is obsessed about the welfare of people around her. All the doctors working with her have to work hard for post graduation. She is a born teacher and makes sure that doctors improve their clinical skills and background knowledge. All her ward rounds were conducted very solemnly and they were full of practical tips with time tested comments. She ensured that doctors work hard and prepare for their examinations. Her enthusiasm for teaching and imparting practical training would be at the peak near their examinations. Many of the doctors would only study to escape her wrath and in that they would pass the examination. Most of the practicing obstetricians and gynaecologists are bye products of her training and hard work.

Perhaps no body in Pakistan can surpass her brilliant career and achievements in academics. She holds a very special position at international level in her field. She is author of many international papers and has some creditable pioneering research work in quite a few fields of gynaecology. She has played a major role in establishing obstetrics and gynaecology in the province of NWFP. She was the first professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in NWFP. She has been decorated with various medals and honours nationally and internationally.

One factor that distinguishes her from others is her belief in human sanctity and respect for human values. When ever her accounts will be checked on the final Day of Judgment, she will have countless prayers of poor people who owe their lives to her. She will have blessings of unlimited unknown faces whose children were fed by her. Many hearts will recommend her, who kept beating on the energy provided by her. Many young persons will have their hands raised up in the air, for the books and clothes they got from her. She is in the fore front of all philanthropic activities in the province specially and in the country generally.

She is sister and mother to innumerable people in the city of Peshawar. And for sure she knows how to honour the sanctity of these bonds. She becomes restless when some one close to her gets into trouble and it seems that she feels the same pain as the other person is experiencing. She can go to any limit to help her friends and well wishers. She mobilizes all her resources and ensures 'the best of best' for them. There are innumerable examples when she came to rescue of people and achieved what was thought to be not possible

She never takes 'no' for an answer. If a job has to be done it has to be done. She is willing to work as hard as possible to achieve the 'impossible'. She inculcates similar qualities in her trainees and inspires them to work like her. She is a workaholic whose day starts early in the morning and keeps working without any break till late. In spite of being busy and short of time, she is always fresh and ready to receive guests and friends at her house. Her restless soul aspires to see smile on every one's face. She wants every one to contribute optimally to the improvement of society and the country.

Prof Zakia Minhas is a gift of God to the people of NWFP in particular and Pakistan in general. People of her qualities are born after centuries. The love, that she has for the down trodden and under privileged people of our society, is highly commendable. Her enthusiasm for teaching is inspiring. Her life is a model for all of us to follow. Her dedication to the profession is worth emulation. Honesty, sincerity and straight-forwardness are the gems which she has in plenty and that adorn her personality. Her sweet smile bestows life and ignites candles of hope in the darkness of despondency in many lives.

MEHFOOZ UR REHMAN – ANSWER TO ALL PROBLEMS

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." Eleanor Roosevelt.

He was an answer to all the problems! If some one had a debt to pay, if a class four employee had a daughter to get married, if a young teacher had a personal, social or economical problem, if a cadet was too poor to pay his fee bill or a cadet had pain in the stomach- the answer was Mr Mehfooz ur Rehman. Not only that, if teachers had arguments with one another, if cadets had fight among themselves, a teacher experienced pain in the chest or if parents had a problem with a teacher – all would be amicably taken care by him.

Mr Mehfooz ur Rehman started his career in Cadet College Hasanabdal in 1967 as a junior teacher in biology. He served one of the best institutes with honesty and dedication till he hung his gloves in 2001. He had the distinction of serving as a house master of Jinnah wing for fifteen long years, which in itself is a record. He headed the department of biology and brought many changes in the department. He ascended to the coveted job of vice principal after remaining assistant vice principal for a few years. His stint in the office saw many improvements in the college. As soon as he retired he was requested to head a school in the southern Punjab where he is still serving the nation with the same vigour and zeal.

He was a fantastic teacher and had tremendous grasp on his subject of Botany. He had a peculiar style and took his time in elaborating his point. He was very candid in his explanation and that would help in delivering good concept of the topic. He came well prepared for his classes and was always encouraging to interact. He was one person who would not raise eyebrows on asking question rather he would encourage inquisitive cadets to ask more questions. He would experiment with new ways of teaching and I fondly remember his showing us academic movies on different subjects. Cadets could go to him at all times to solve their problems of Botany.

House master of a wing has a major role to play in the character building of cadets. The college has six wings and cadets from class eight to second year FSc share the same hostel. Every house or wing has its own chain of command. There is intense competition among the wings in various fields of sports, speeches, indoor games and academics. House master is like a father of the house and has to keep a vigilant eye on the various 'activities' that go on in the wing. As a house master Mr Mehfooz ur Rehman had very close and constructive relationship with all cadets. He not only knew them by name but also knew their family background and most importantly problems faced by them. He could 'read' every one's face and would often call them to his office to discuss their problems. His attached house was like an 'open house' and all had free access to it. Many a times the cadets will visit his house to have some thing better to eat. Many cadets would visit his house to 'pour' out their feelings. All parents enjoyed good working relationship with him and he would be most helpful in solving their problems.

As a vice principal he had the most to contribute. Because of his wealth of experience and a healthier attitude, he was well respected by all. His advice was sought and followed by everyone in the college. He made positive contribution in setting healthier trends in the college in academics and sports. Academics improved in his time and he had a major role to start 'O' levels in the college. He used to visit wings during the study hour in the evenings and helped cadets in sorting out their problems.

He was a born optimist and great believer in preserving 'self esteem' of everyone -regardless of job and class. He was the same for everyone. He had a perennial smile that adorned his face all the time. He was an example of an ideal person who would enjoy his job and rendered his services without any expectation of worldly reward. Even during extremely tense situations, he had his feet firm on the ground. He would stay composed and firm. He exuded self confidence and would be a source of inspiration for his team.

He was most respectful to his juniors and that gave Class 4 employees enough confidence to approach him for even their personal problems. These problems could be their debts, illness of a relative or marriage of a child. He would listen to all their problems and give his advice. He was most extravagant within his resources. Very often he will be busy in 'fund raising' for these different activities. He used the rich bank of his 'devotees' - the ex-cadets to solve problems of his subordinates.

Most of the ex -cadets like myself would respect him like a father and undoubtedly he demonstrated the same love and affection that only a father can have for a son. When our children joined the college, he naturally became their 'grand father'. He would take great pride in his grand children and would look after them with more love and tenderness. As time passed by there was an increasing number of grand children in the college. This fraternity kept growing and every one believed that he was the closest to Mr Mehfooz ur Rehman. The relationship between the grand father and the grand children was quite strange, where as he had all the love for them, the grand children had to follow the rules and were otherwise treated like ordinary cadets.

He had inborn qualities of leadership and was at his best to win hearts with love and sincerity. He was very popular among the junior staff members who would derive their inspiration from him. He would look after all of them like his younger brothers. They would go to him for all their problems. Many teachers followed him to his new job leaving behind their careers in Hasanabdal. His modus operandi was simple but effective. He would use the most effective weapons of honesty and sincerity, and nobody would escape from these weapons. He led a simple life and every one would feel comfortable with him.

His name is still synonymous with the image of Cadet College Hasanabdal. He was an institution in his own self. He was a beacon of love, honesty and sincerity. He was member of the rare breed of academicians who took pride in teaching and building character of their students. He was among those very rare individuals who invested their whole life in education. He distinguished himself among the ordinary mortals who upheld the flag of truth and uprightness all the times and never compromised on principles.

A TEACHER, A MENTOR – SYED AKHTAR ALI ZAIDI

"Success in life is a matter not so much of talent and opportunity as of concentration and perseverance." C.W Wendte.

"Recite it Again," I complied while reciting the famous Ghazal of Ghalib in the class, "Recite it again!" I recited the couplet again. "No way, this cannot be explained; you have to feel it!" said Mr. Zaidi with his usual 'know all' and mysterious smile. Perplexed we looked at each other, as that way of teaching was rather new for us. And then having said that, Mr. Zaidi would take half an hour to 'demystify" it and elucidate it from all the angles. Giving the background and explaining all the 'soft notions' and pertinent points opened new windows of imagination and literary jugglery in our novice minds. He would often conclude by repeating, "Look, I told you it cannot be explained." Then, it dawned upon us that many things are better understood with 'inner heart' without putting it in words! This was our first de-facto introduction to literature!

"Hafiz, you must occupy this seat in front. I enjoy teaching when I see you in front of me!" he told me when I changed my seat due to some reason. I was not the only one who happened to be his favourite. Every cadet was his favourite and enjoyed a cordial and special relationship with him. He refused to teach one day as one oh his favourites Nisar Ahmed was absent from

the class. We used to look forward to his period, as learning Urdu was not for passing the examination rather it became a 'passion' and 'challenge' for us. We would be discussing a couplet for hours and deliberating it form different angles and enjoy it. Slowly and gradually we developed a 'poetical' sense and could actually appreciate literary 'pieces' and their 'ramifications'. Teaching literature may not be that difficult but to create and nurture sense of appreciation and penchant for it is surely an uphill task!

He had tremendous command on Urdu prose and poetry. He was one of the fortunate ones who enjoyed what they did! He ravished poetry and seemed to know thousands of couplets by heart. He could relate a couplet at most of the occasions and could employ many couplets to explicate one couplet. He made everything interesting by his comments, delivery and explaining the background.

Many of the current poets were his personal friends. Of them Josh Maleeh abadi was quite close to him and used to visit him off and on. At times, Mr Zaidi would invite some of us to interact with him. That used to be a real treat for us as it was more like 'practical work' in a laboratory. May be it was a conscious effort on his part to expose his students to the 'real world' and perhaps assess their acumen and aptitude and scrutinize what they had learnt.

He had equally good grasp of English language and literature. It would be very inspiring and exciting to hear from him about the comparisons and contrasts of different literatures. He could quote quite extensively from English, Urdu and Persian literatures. His balanced approach and wide knowledge enabled him to put things in perspective. Many a times he would dwell in detail on a single point and present the subject in focus 'unattired' in its 'truest' form!

During our time in late sixties and early seventies he was House master of Liaqat wing. He had a level headed and even-handed approach to cadets. He was very popular among seniors and juniors as he had the wonderful quality of mixing up with all age groups. He could bring out the best in everyone. His smiling face and encouraging attitude was most inspiring for all of us. He was full of anecdotes, interesting quotations and

verses, and he would take great pains to explain them. He was a continuous source of knowledge and love for all around him!

He joined the college in 1954 and so was one of the pioneers of the college. He did not sever the bond of dedication with the college till he retired in 1984. He remained Vice Principal from 1979 to 1984. He represented Pakistan on deputation in Maldives serving as Principal of Majeedia School. This was a cosmopolitan school dominated by Sri Lankan and Australian teachers. He was very popular among students and teachers although he was not teaching Urdu over there.

He, for one, did not believe in sermons. His life was a practical example, as he believed in leading by example. His way of reprimanding was very different and instructive. No shouting, raving or caning. His art was to make you realize your mistake in straightforward and comprehensible language. He would make you believe that every thing being done was in the cadet's interest. None could surpass him in this art. A cadet would feel so ashamed that he would never repeat it. With his fatherly approach, the feeling of anguish, hurt and insult would give way to trust, admiration and confidence.

He was a very meticulous man who exercised utmost sense of refinement in all the fields. He was a thorough gentleman and had 'elegance' written all over him. I admired the immaculate way in which he dressed and conducted himself. He was particularly keen of ties. I started counting his ties and I lost the count of them! Even now, when ever I see some one wearing a nice tie I think of Zaidi Sahib.

Younger staff members would derive inspiration from him and would emulate his example. Many of the staff members used to play scrabble and enjoy his young-at-heart company. The game besides being an intellectual exercise provided a unique opportunity to imbibe knowledge and amass pearls of wisdom and experience from him. He, as munificent at heart, would generously distribute all he had!

"My prayers are with you in fulfillment of all your just aspirations," wrote Mr Zaidi in my autograph book when I was leaving Cadet College. In spite of my profound love and admiration for him and his boundless love and kindness for me, he had to bless me with his 'conditional' prayers only for 'just

aspiration.' So strong was his sense of justice and righteousness. In the sea of emotion and devotion he would stand like a rock with supreme sense of fairness and integrity. Rarely is humanity blessed with people like him!

THE SMILING DR AZIZ GUL!

Its 2 am in the morning and I am in one of the hotels in Karachi. Though we had a long day attending a conference and the body is very tired, I just cannot go to sleep. I am wide awake and feel like crying loudly and mourn his death. I want that the whole world should know that our dear friend, colleague and brother Dr Aziz Gul Mufti has departed this worldly abode. As I announce his death in the meeting it plunges the whole group in grief. Though tears wish to wet my cheeks, as I visualise him with his perennial smile, he forbids me from shedding any tears. This is exactly what he told his beloved daughters and wife, not to be upset as it was in his destiny. Unfortunately he left us when he was on top of every thing.

He had an infectious smile and very rarely would one see him without a smirk. As a matter of fact he was one person one could have never imagined that the icy hands of death would take him away from us. He had a roaring laughter and he would let it out full throat. His laughters still echo in the corridors of Cardiology Department and Cardiac Catheterisation laboratory of Lady Reading Hospital and Rehman Medical Institute. Medical ward rounds are normally a serious and somber affair, as we have sick patients around us, but even then his tremendous sense of humour and jovial nature would see the lighter aspect of life and release the tension.

Dr Aziz Gul Mufti passed his intermediate examination from Edwards College, and got his medical schooling from Khyber

Medical College. He was an outgoing student and was a popular figure of the class as he was liked by all the fellow students. He was famous in the college for his commentaries on cricket matches on annual days. His good grasp on English language, impeccable accent and wonderful sense of humour distinguished him from the rest and made him an ideal candidate for the job.

He received his post graduate medical training in USA and underwent advanced training of Cardiology in Alabama. He joined Lady Reading Hospital as assistant professor in Cardiology Department in 1991. He has the unique distinction of establishing the nuclear department and was the first nuclear cardiologist in the province. He was a very well-trained cardiologist and had a lot of experience in interventional cardiology under his belt. He was an ace angioplaster and it was a treat working with him in the cardiac catheterisation laboratory. He would keep his calm and had the wonderful quality of being persistent. His dictum of "better is the enemy of good," was quoted by every one including the staff when a case had to be abandoned due to technical reasons.

He added a new flavour to the otherwise dull atmosphere of Cardiology Department. He was full of jokes and quotations. He had a joke ready for every occasion. And then he had a wonderful style of telling jokes. His company was always entertaining and enthralling. He had rich vocabulary and would employ his words very cautiously and meticulously. He was master of idioms and knew how to use them astutely. We all had to be careful in his company with our grammar and words. We still remember his idioms and they have become the local 'colloquial' of the cardiology unit. He had his greatest influence on the doctors in training as they learnt both cardiology and English from him.

We used to envy his apparent care free attitude towards life. He enjoyed life and had a healthy attitude towards life. He would not sweat over minor things and knew how and when to say 'no' whenever required. Most of us 'obsessional neurotics' try to reach airport an hour before flight time, not him - he would literally catch the flight by tail and still appear totally relaxed.

He was good at everything he did; he fell in love with golf when he came to Pakistan. In a few weeks he was among the 'good golfers' and shortly he could boast of a few trophies that he won in golf. At one time, everything revolved around golf, he went to play golf before clinic and during golf tournaments everything else would take a back seat. Playing golf with him would be most enjoyable as on every hole he had something nice to say and a new story to be told. His attitude remained the same that the game is to be enjoyed and not to be obsessed about. His golf jokes were quoted and 'retold' by all his partners.

He was a diehard Peshawari, and loved the local traditions and culture. He loved the local cuisine and when he came back from his last trip of US he would remember his mother and the exotic Peshawari food she used to cook. When my wife cooked 'Shola' and 'Panchey' for him he really enjoyed it. I loved to see him in old and traditional good old 'Do Ghora boski' shirt and shalwar. He loved the local language and was master of Hindko. He enjoyed conversing in Hindko with the same enthusiasm for punch lines and local idioms.

He was a man of principles and would never compromise on them. He was a straightforward person and would speak his mind without any hesitation. He hated hypocrisy and would never ever indulge in backbiting. Nothing prevented him to express himself and he had his own peculiar style of expressing himself. When the government banned private practice he did not think twice before quitting his coveted job. This was an honourable thing to do at that time and he went ahead with it. Some of the doctors may have had second thoughts but not him. He was happy working in Lady Reading Hospital and perhaps happier when he joined Rehman Medical Institute. He knew and wanted to keep himself happy and he did it.

Our first interaction between the families took place on a trip to Nathiagali. Most of the time he would be telling us jokes and we would be laughing our heads out. We had a long walk from Nathiagali to Dungagali, and the time passed in a jiffy in his company. We would be sitting till late in the lawn of famous Green hotel and talk ceaselessly. Later we travelled together to Bhurban in the company of Prof Bakht Biland: the game of golf we played; the walk we enjoyed and the ghazals of Hamid Ali Khan we listened to have become a part of history but the good

moments keep haunting me. On a trip to Bangkok he was in charge of all the programmes and he organised the trip in most memorable and enjoyable way. We were a group of ten cardiologists who visited Paris a few years ago. Our regular stop on Champs Elysses on a tea shop was to update on jokes of Aziz Gul. The cool breeze under the shade of towering trees and our laughing at his jokes seems like the best of the memories of France.

When I told my staff that Aziz Gul needed some blood, every body was more than eager to donate. The staff liked him for his friendly nature and sense of humour. His patients simply loved him as he used to look after them very well. They used to find him very friendly, straightforward and honest. He would not make tall claims but explain the patient's condition in simple and easy-to-understand terms. He believed in equality and provided the best care to all regardless of their social stature.

As the luck would have it he was afflicted with a malady with no cure but that could not purloin his sense of humour and strong will. He was very solidly supported by his very supportive wife and dedicated daughters. However 'my hero' had been the younger daughter who took charge of everything in the end. She would be up all night and day and encourage her father all the time. Her courage and wisdom amazed me as we always thought of her as a little 'tom boy'. Her conviction and persistence were enviable, and surprised me. Aziz Gul had no complaints from life as he enjoyed every second that he lived. He had a full life, a bright career and loving circle of friends and more than anything else, a very loving and dedicated family. But we all feel a little cheated as he left at a time where he was at the peak of his career and started enjoying his life. He rather exited in a hurry when he was most needed by his family, friends and patients.

PROF NASIRUDDIN AZAM KHAN - THE MAN OF PRINCIPLES

"And in the end its not the years in your life that count. Its the life in your years." Abraham Lincoln

My only prayer at one time was, "Oh God give me house job in Dr Nasir's ward." Day in and day out, I would pray my heart out. I was neither worried about the top slot nor bothered about the marks. My dream and wish was to receive the training from him. Of course it was abundantly clear that only the top students could get into his ward as the competition was very tough. His practice of medicine was of the highest order with a strong element of service to the poor. I had worked very hard for my final year MBBS examination and was looking forward to my career in practical life. Allah Subhanu Taala was very kind and I topped Final year, hence in the house job interview I had the first choice and I chose his ward!

His class started exactly at eight on Monday and nobody could afford to be late even by five minutes. His class used to be full and there used to be pin drop silence. He has tremendous command on his subject and he is master of oration. His lectures were the 'best' and the topic of discussion for the students till the next week. Many of our friends could memorise his lectures and reproduce on demand. Such was the lucidity and eloquence that his lectures still echo in our mind. We were all scared of him! He carried an aura and every one respected him.

He has been the torch bearer of ethics in medical practice. Undoubtedly he has set a personal example as a role model. He may have been a loser in monetary terms but he has gained a lot of respect because of that. He had been a preacher of medical ethics and has been able to set very high standards for others to follow. He has the unique distinction of being the only doctor in his class who had his private practice at his residence. He had his clinic at his residence in Dabgari Gardens and now for the last two decades, where as every one else has rushed to Dabgari gardens, he is perhaps the only one who has opted to practice at his own house. He never had a laboratory or a drug store in his clinic.

"You are the chosen people and the best of the selected class. This should be evident from your conduct and behavior," he would tell doctors. He has been a strong believer in upholding the esteem of medical profession. He has been emphasizing that doctors should look like doctors and behave like professional doctors. He has been member of innumerable medical and non medical committees and has always been able to get his point across and prevail upon his principles.

Ward rounds in his days used to be a solemn and serious affair. His ward used to be clean and shining. The staff in the morning used to be running around like scalded cats. Incomplete paper work had to be completed, investigations had to be fetched and every thing had to be worked up and be presentable before the ward round. There was no question of having any attendants in the ward. It was like a Monday morning parade and conducted exquisitely. Seniors like associate and assistant professors used to present the round and we would try to hide behind them for any omission or commission. Under no circumstances a patient could be denied his prescribed medicines. There could be no reason for not having investigations complete. Excuses like 'patient cannot afford it' were not acceptable as we had access to private funds available for poor patients. The whole system was organized around patients, and they were the centre of all activity.

"How is the patient on bed no 16, and what is the blood sugar of patient on bed on 25?" he would ask on his daily evening 'telephonic rounds'. Not only that he remembered each and every patient in the ward, he was genuinely worried about them.

Medicine to him is like an 'Ibadat'. He would take a round every morning and would not miss it for any meeting or appointment. Every thing else was of secondary importance. He would check on serious patients in the afternoon before leaving for home. The consultant on evening round had to give a detailed bed wise report on telephone. He would be more than willing to come and see a patient at any time of the day. He would keep himself updated on his patients and would take keen interest in their recovery. He gave us a practical demonstration showed us how to shoulder this heavenly duty!

History taking is the most important asset and skill a doctor can have. All of his students can feel proud that he had been able to inculcate this skill in them very prudently and diligently. He taught us how to extract history from patients and his emphasis on history based diagnosis improved our clinical skills. His example of a hakeem holding some one's pulse and trying to assimilate history and diagnose the ailment on the basis of history is still being quoted and re-quoted! He used to emphasise that it is the patient who reveals the diagnosis and one has to listen to the patient.

He held academics in highest esteem. He would keep him self updated and would be willing to answer questions in the ward round on any subject. He has in-depth knowledge of medicine and has an insatiable appetite to learn more. He, even at this age, makes it a priority to participate actively in all the academic activities of the province and makes a positive contribution in the proceedings. His comments, usually as a chairman, are thought provoking and contain a clear take home message. He adds life to all these activities.

"No, I am sorry this cannot be done," he would say occasionally and that would be the final verdict. He had always been known as a man of principles and he would follow them regardless of consequences. He is one of the few doctors who would follow the dictates of conscience and would not compromise on principles. His principles are more important to him than any thing else!

He rears a very tender heart behind the veil of being a man of principles and very firm disciplinarian. He is most loving and exhibits his love by implanting a 'tender kiss'. Very few people

in the present age still hold on to the old traditions of love and respect. He is among the very few of the special breed who rear love for their students and treat them like their own children. He has unlimited love and he is most gracious in his conduct.

Allah Subhanu Taala has been very kind to him. He is one of the 'most well decorated soldiers' in the medical community. He had the honour of being the Principal and Dean of Khyber Medical College, he held the honorary rank of Brigadier in the Army and had been Physician to the President of Pakistan. He is member of almost all the important medical societies at international level. He made significant contributions to the cause of medicine as a vice president of Pakistan Medical and Dental council. The best part is that he never sought any of these awards rather they were bestowed upon him. He received the pride of performance and perhaps deserved a lot more medals that government can confer. He has the unique distinction of being appointed as a minister in the Govt of NWFP. His track record of accomplishments is very long and needs a book to mention some! We in the medical community believe that God had been so generous to him for his being an excellent doctor, wonderful teacher and able administrator.

He had been a special gift to the world of medicine of NWFP in particular and Pakistan in general. He has been a role model for many like me who learnt the basics of medicine and medical ethics from him. He, with his eloquence and dexterity with words, emphasized the importance of sanctity of human life. He infused the sense of fair play and justice in his students. He showed us that no force could bow his head and no worldly gain could tempt him to alter his path of right and justice. On the Day of Judgment he will have his head high up for the services he rendered to the ailing humanity, the love he had for the down trodden and for being an immaculate teacher cum role model who inspired innumerable students to be proud of donning their white overalls!

THE GENTLEMAN EXTRAORDINARY - PROF DR SIRAJ-UD-DIN

"He has all the qualities that I have and many more that I do not have," remarked Prof Nasiruddin Azam Khan while introducing him in a recently held seminar on Cardiac updates in Peshawar. Though we are all aware of his sterling qualities in the field of medicine, what 'does he have extra' is the intriguing part of the story. His comments in the workshop revealed as to why he was being regarded as a 'gentleman extraordinary.' His even-handed, balanced and realistic approach wins that coveted position for him in the world of medicine.

Never had a student gone to his clinic asking for an attachment. He was surprised and quite happy as well at the same time. It was 1975, I was in second year MBBS in Khyber Medical College and because of the political problems we were forced to enjoy unwanted and prolonged holidays under the shadows of insecurity and uncertainty. Without any previous introduction I ventured into his clinic and he whole heartedly accepted me. Being a born and compulsive teacher he started teaching me. This was my first step in the world of clinical medicine. For the last thirty years, he has been my teacher and

mentor, always guiding me and encouraging me in medical and non medical fields.

One of the best aspects of his personality is his extreme self-control and unlimited patience. Whether God has bestowed him with these attributes or he has acquired them through hard work and training - no one knows. But I have never seen him angry. Even most irritating people lay down arms in front of his genuine humility and tolerance. Many patients prefer to consult him because he has all the time and patience in the world to listen to their stories. In the class a stupid question or a silly answer could not provoke him. He kept on smiling and answered questions without getting annoyed. He never raised his voice and never broke his cool. He never used to ridicule his house staff and as a result they used to give their best in his presence in a relaxed atmosphere. He was one of the most favourite examiners as he would never create a false 'aura' or pest the poor candidates.

He was received in the medical community as a fresh breath and a big change. Most previous teachers would wear a stern look and could be classified as 'classical professors'. His face is adorned with a perennial smile which is almost infectious! He has a peculiar style while concentrating or listening intently, where he bows his head down, then looks up, raises his eye brows, looks up to Heaven and his face melts down in a broad smile. Even as a principal he had a smile to present to all the staff and students.

He is considered as one of the experts on medical education at national levels. It has been more like a passion to him. He attended many international conferences and tried to infuse new spirit in the curriculum of medicine. He brought in many changes in methods of teaching and evaluation while he was the principal. He has tried to bring in some fundamental changes in the system of evaluation and examination in the College of Physician and Surgeons Pakistan. He has the singular credit of writing a book on medical education and then revising it with a second edition published only recently.

His best asset is his intelligence and he uses that judiciously. He has a very balanced approach to problems and faces all problems whether medical or non-medical with common sense.

He is well versed with the art of splitting the hair but retains the ability to appreciate the totality of the matter. He is master of mixing science and arts -combining the two in his daily medical practice and day to day life.

He is the record-bearer of having the busiest clinic in the history of Peshawar. Patients just love him! He has all the qualities of a good doctor plus the qualities of an 'extraordinary' kind human being. No wonder patients worship him like a 'Peer'. Because of his 'holistic' approach he can perhaps claim the highest 'cure' rate in Pakistan. He is an expert diagnostician and bases his diagnosis on good clinical history as he is good in establishing good working relationship with the patient. He has to his credit many new changes in the way we practise medicine. He introduced practical type of prescriptions which are easier for the patients to follow.

God has been very kind to him! He has children who hold records in their chosen fields. There must be something very special in his genes and his rearing up. All three of them have excelled in their respective fields. Omair, the youngest one who has been trained in UK and USA, distinguished himself in his field and contributed significantly in Human resource development in Pakistan. Yasir is a budding cardiologist receiving training in interventional procedures in USA. Aimal is a 'science whiz kid' who is a genius and the most sought-after scientist in his field. His son in law, Ovais a cardiologist, had the heart to donate a large number of stents and hardware to our department for poor people.

By sheer chance I opened up the book by Jalaluddin Rumi and came across following verses which happen to be equally applicable to Shams uddin Tabrez and Prof Siraj.

When he is bitter
It's better than a candy shop
When he turns his head away
It's all hugs and kisses
His infidelity is faith
His stones are jewels
His holding back is giving
His ruthlessness is mercy.

FATHER OF CARDIOLOGY - PROF WAHEED AHMED SAHIBZADA

The name of Waheed Ahmed Sahibzada carries the image of hard work, honesty and sincerity of cause. People in Lady Reading Hospital used to time their watches with his routine. He has been the voice of reason and logic in medical community. Because of his matter of fact and sagacious approach, he became 'the answer' to all problems and was entrusted with all 'difficult and unsolvable' dilemmas in the hospital and institute. In the world of cardiology, he earned unrivaled esteem due to his professionalism, hard work and sincerity

Besides his many other qualities in administration and being a 'nearly perfect' doctor that will make Avicenna proud, he is perhaps one of the few persons who strictly adheres to the 'Hippocratic oath'. Throughout his career he proved by his actions that it is possible to practise what one preaches. Hypocrisy is and was a forbidden fruit for him. He is an extremely upright person and will always stand by his principles regardless of consequences. He has been the torch-bearer of ethics in medical practice. Undoubtedly he has set a personal example as a role model. He had been a preacher of medical ethics and has been able to set very high standards for others to follow.

Though he may have a stern appearance, deep down he is an extremely kind-hearted gentleman. His heart beats for the poor.

Throughout his career he has been trying to develop schemes to provide a safety net for the poor and under privileged. All the hard work put in the 'User Charges' scheme of Cardiology department was to offer free services to the poor. He put in a lot of hard work for Zakat scheme and the additional grant in aid from the government. To initiate such schemes may not be that difficult but to run it successfully need a lot more efforts. All this became possible due to his untiring efforts and discipline

Graduate of Khyber Medical College, Peshawar he received his postgraduate medical training in USA where he did his residency in medicine and cardiology fellowship in South Dakota. He joined Khyber Medical College and Khyber Teaching Hospital (KTH) as Professor of Cardiology in 1979. He laid down the foundation of a modern Cardiology Unit in KTH. He established state-of-the-art non-invasive unit and invasive work started with installation of Cardiac catheterization laboratory in 1984. Cardiology department moved from KTH to newly-created Postgraduate Medical Institute, Lady Reading Hospital, Peshawar. A purpose built cardiology and cardiac surgery block was planned and executed under his leadership in Post Graduate Medical Institute in Lady Reading Hospital in 1991.

From a humble start in KTH the services of cardiology soared to new heights, offering all non-invasive and interventional facilities under one roof. Peshawar was the first centre to offer services of Doppler echocardiography, transesophageal echocardiography and colour Doppler in Pakistan. Interventional work started in mid eighties with services of angioplasty and valvuplasty by the start of nineties. Peshawar boasts of pioneering Mitral valvuplasty in 1991 with the technical help of Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston USA. Lady Reading Hospital is perhaps the only department in public sector to offer nuclear studies and signal average ECG to patients.

Besides being an excellent physician and cardiologist, Allah has blessed him with unlimited ability of innovative thinking and mathematical skills. He introduced the concept of 'User charges' and streamlined free 'entry to exit' services to poor and entitled patients. This was a novel concept and a very daunting step where cardiology department was given limited economic autonomy and allowed to keep all earnings from different

sources. It was for the first time in the history of medicine that a department was given the responsibility of maintaining its own accounts. In lieu, Cardiology Department took upon itself to provide free entry to exit services to all deserving patients. Patients who are entitled or deserve to benefit from 'poor free or Zakat fund' are offered all services totally free of cost. In usual circumstances, though medical services are free in hospitals but patients are provided with long list of medicines to procure from outside through their personal resources. That is not the case with Cardiology Department as everything is provided free of cost from the department maintained inventory. A patient requiring Cardiac Catheterization or any advanced interventional procedure like angioplasty or stenting regardless of number of vessels involved is offered everything free of cost. This can cost anything from ten thousand to a couple of lakh rupees. A patient in need of pacemaker costing around seventy thousands is also offered all the facilities without any cost to the patient. Similarly, opening up of valves called Valvuplasty is offered pro bono to all the deserving patients. At present Interventional Cardiology services are being offered at very low rates to deserving patients and more than seventy percent of the procedures are being done free of cost. The credit for all this goes to Waheed A Sahibzada for developing the scheme and running it successfully.

It was through his personal efforts that the department of cardiology started receiving regular funding for cardiology services and open heart surgery performed by cardiac surgical department from Zakat fund. The department, also continues to support the poor patients and makes regular contribution to the services of poor and Zakat patients out of its own resources. In the due course the department has contributed more than two millions for the treatment of poor and Zakat patients. This is on top of maintaining high quality services at rates less than one half of prevalent rates in the private market and one fourth of rates being charged in the country outside NWFP.

Academics had always been close to his heart and he started regular sessions of ECG training and Advance Cardiac Life Support. Regular journal club and core curriculum sessions were held in his times. He tried to improve the postgraduate training during his tenure as dean of Postgraduate Medical Institute

Peshawar. At present he is serving as the project director of Khyber Medical University and shouldering the onerous responsibility of dean of Postgraduate Medical Education at Rehman Medical Institute Peshawar.

He has keen interest in research and many projects were conceived and conducted in his time. He has to his credit numerous publications in national and international journals. Cardiology Department has always been respected as an academic department with significant contribution towards research. His main interest was echocardiography and Doppler but now he is concentrating more on interventional cardiology.

Waheed Ahmed Sahibzada is pioneer of modern cardiology in NWFP. He single-handedly laid down the basis for state-of-the-art diagnostic and therapeutic services. He is a dexterous interventional cardiologist who pioneered most of the interventional procedures in NWFP. All this became possible due to his dedicated work and innovative approach. He is a born teacher who disseminated the knowledge of cardiology at all levels. For the people of NWFP he wrote a new chapter in the annals of medicine by offering new services and developing new system and leading by example.

THE FAVOURITE OF ALL!

As soon as the news of September 11 reached her, two goats were immediately sacrificed. One of her son who resides in UK and was traveling to Atlanta, USA and one for me as I was attending a meeting in Washington at that time. This was her way of ensuring that we remained safe, and be "protected". This was in line with her belief of 'Sadqa' and 'Khairat'. This also demonstrated her profound love for her children and my good fortune chose me to be one of them.

Though she had been quite ill for the last few years Auntie was a valiant fighter. She would bounce back with new zeal and enthusiasm after her illness and surprise us by her recovery. A couple of years ago she was seriously ill and remained unconscious for nearly forty eight hours. We had nearly lost hopes for her recovery. But there she was a couple of weeks later walking on her own with the help of a walker. During her last illness she again surprised us by her tenacity. This was like a roller coaster ride - up and down, at times she would improve and that would raise new hopes and later something else would go wrong dashing all our hopes. But against all the odds we were optimistic in view of her old track and 'habit' of recovering and surprising us. But, alas, she said good bye to this worldly abode a week ago.

Auntie was no ordinary patient. No doctor could just treat her and remain only an objective 'doctor'. Auntie's charming nature had a trap for them. And sooner or later he or she would become

a part of her family. Every one, who was involved in her care had been emotionally involved. Right from the nurse who used to look after her to the doctor who administered her injections and drips, all became very fond of her. With her recurrent admissions she would develop new friendships and new relations with the hospital staff. She was like a beehive and all were attracted to her because of her unlimited love and kindness.

'I am perfectly well and feel good," she would announce whenever she was asked. She was a very genuine person by and large but more so as a patient. Unlike many other patients who thrive on complaints she would be the one who would not like to bother any one. Those looking after her were instructed to report anything untoward urgently as Auntie would not like to attract any attention unnecessarily. She hated to complain and was most thankful to Allah when ever she felt better.

'How did you go to Stockholm without an NOC?" auntie and uncle would ask me jokingly. The joke in the family was that I had to have an NOC from the government and another from them before I could leave the country. Most of the times I would leave quietly as my absence caused unnecessary alarm and concern. My modus operandi would be to visit them a night before and ensure that they were both well and have a good chat. More often than not the news of departure would be leaked by my house holds and auntie would be very restless and concerned.

"Irshad would be landing at New York at 11 am local time, have a meeting and then go to Atlanta and leave at 4 pm to reach London as he has to fly again the next morning for Milano for another meeting," auntie would inform us. She was a very intelligent lady and used to keep a complete track of things. Her statements were never vague rather they were supported by facts and figures. She had first hand knowledge of all the activities of the family and she would take keen interest in them.

My whole family was wallowed in her love. She had special independent relationships with all of us. My better half, who at one time felt like a traditional 'daughter in law', grew so fond of her that she became her very special friend and an ardent admirer. Auntie was most happy on my son's book launching

and was most concerned about his studies. Slowly and gradually our families became a part of a large family which was headed by her. To her we would turn to for advice and help.

God had blessed her with tremendous sense of humour. Her house would rock with laughter as she always had a joke or an interesting anecdote to share. Her spontaneous remarks and jokes still echo in the house but without her it seems deserted and haunted. Auntie enjoyed chatting on phone and this was the biggest source of her information. She would keep her self updated on the 'local' politics and developments. She was a good conversationalist and she could chat with any age group. She had a hearing ear for every one so every one will open their hearts to her. Being kind and sympathetic she would try her level best to solve their problems.

She had her own style of doing things. She was very well dressed and enjoyed good clothes. She would be immaculately dressed with matching shoes and sitting on her specific chair waiting and welcoming the guests. She was an ardent believer of cleanliness and her house and life was an example of it. Only a few months ago she renovated the house. Little did she know that she may not be able to enjoy it for a long time! Auntie was a proud lady and had tremendous self respect. She knew how to respect others and commanded the same in return.

Her grand children used to love her and specially Arman was and is very fond of her as he would be pampered by her. The preparations will start well in advance to receive the young man and make his stay more entertaining. She had strong personal relations with Zara and Salina and was their 'personal friend'. The ability to develop good relations with all age groups endeared her to all the 'kids of the block'. She was known as 'Ghata Ammie' with love and respect. Aaleena was like her 'best pal' who would be at her bed side all the time and share her joys and sorrows. She perhaps had the good fortune of being closest to her and imbibed many good things from her. Auntie's most cherished dream was to see her newly born great grand daughter 'Guloona', who was borred at the time auntie was bidding adieu to this transient world. Asim was her most favourite and she was always most concerned about his well being.

Her house hold staff used to be very concerned about her. Never in their life had they had seen some one more kind and loving than her. The relationship was not of an employer and employee! They were like her own children and were thoroughly spoiled by her. If there was any thing lacking that was fulfilled by the most generous of all -'the Arab Shehzada' as auntie would call her son lovingly. She was particularly fond of her long standing driver cum cook Shakeel, whom she had great trust in and loved him. Of course he was most upset on her sad demise as if he had lost his own mother.

She enjoyed most cordial relationships based on mutual love and respect with her children and their spouses. All formal relationships had been transformed into personal warm relationships. I remember her shedding tears for her son-in-law and was most upset for him. It was due to her endearing personality that one of her daughters-in-law spent a month looking after her when auntie needed the support. Her favourite son was Irshad who must be given the award of 'the best son' ever born. He would be in touch with her at least twice a day regardless of wherever he was! Though based abroad he would make it to Peshawar as frequent as twice a week. He would be always available whenever needed. Even otherwise he would be organising and managing day to day care from abroad. He will be in touch with all of us and would be in clear picture. 'Aadi', as auntie would call her, being her niece was very close to her and would ring her up from UK on a daily basis. The daughter-Zahida would be visiting her at least twice a day and would be reprimanded for missing it. Zahida's life revolved around her mother as she was the source of all her happiness and would become very restless to see her unwell.

With her departure we have a lost a canopy of prayers. She was a pearl which will be missed for ever. Her unfortunate departure has created a vacuum in our lives which perhaps will never be filled up. Though every one has to go, some people through their good deeds and immense love, leave behind them many heavy hearts.

BIBI JAN SACRIFICE PERSONIFIED

Bibijan was a supreme example of self sacrifice. She sacrificed all her happiness and aspirations at the altar of self defined principles and self determined duties. Her life was synonymous with love and sacrifice. Her whole life revolved around fulfilling duties which she never had to do! She tried making other people happy which was the ultimate source of joy for her. Right from her youth she bartered her personal joys with responsibilities and obligations of the family. Till the end she tried her best to fulfill her obligation and live up to the expectations.

The icy hands of angel of death took her sister away when she was in early twenties. Her three elder sisters got married and settled in their homes. She was faced with a big challenge, to either commit her whole life to raise seven young children of her late sister or to opt for a personal married life. She, without second thoughts, opted for the first choice. She could not imagine the enormity of the challenge and the tremendous hurdles she had to face on the way! She was determined to raise four young nephews and three nieces as good Muslims and to equip them with all worldly traits and education. Raising seven children that eventually lead to seven happy families was a major undertaking! She took the challenge single handedly and like a 'single parent' ensured good grooming of the children.

It was 3 am as I announced death of a member of the family to her. She got ready to visit the family but before reaching their house she had literally thrusted a five hundred rupees note in

my pocket. This was meant to be my 'mubaraky' for the promotion. Though she was very upset on the sad demise but in her grief she did not want to delay the 'mubarak badi', even for a few hours. She was always very particular about presents and ensured proper gifts to be delivered in time. She was always extravagant in presents, and we always looked forward to her after passing our examinations!

She was a shy and quiet lady but a very good company. She had good memory and even during her last few years she could take one down the memory lane giving vivid glimpses of the past. She had many stories to tell and had an interesting way of unraveling them. She got along well with all regardless of age and background.

She believed in 'personal relationships' and enjoyed extremely cordial relationships with all her grand and great grand children. They were like her personal friends. She would make a big effort to invest in these relationships and enjoyed the respect and love she received from the off springs. She had special gifts for all the younger generation on passing examinations and had special things to offer on Eid.

Among many stories her favourite one included the trips she made to USA and Saudia Arabia. She spent about six weeks in New York with her son Dr Sajjad Ahmed and the family thoroughly enjoyed it. America did not intimidate her, rather she enjoyed discovering new places. She enjoyed visits to Washington and New Jersey. All my Mamoon and Mammani's friends threw lavish dinners for her and undoubtedly she kept New York 'warm and alive' for a few weeks. She endeared all their friends and no one wanted to be left out for not having her as a 'special guest'. Haseeb and Naveed became her favourites and enjoyed her company. No wonder they did not want her to leave America and were crying bitterly at her departure from USA

She had the good fortune of performing Haj along with her sons Dr Sajjad and Salahuddin - who was working in Medinah Shareef at that time. Both the sons had the good fortune of looking after her. She was very lucky to perform all the 'arkan' in a most befitting way. She had always been most grateful to

Allah Subhanu Taalah for His unlimited kindness and offering her the chance to perform Haj.

My mother being the eldest of the family was like second in command besides being a special friend, comrade and adviser to her. They enjoyed exceptionally cordial and friendly relationship based on mutual trust and love. My mother's early demise left a large vacuum in her life which no one could fill. Bibijan's special relationship with us -sister and brothers was an overflow of love for our mother. She used to accompany Ammie on her trips. She visited Karachi a couple of times with Ammie and stayed with our life long family friends. Over there she endeared her self to all. I vividly remember teasing Ammie and Bibijan on their shopping sprees to Bohri Bazar and Tariq road and buying truck loads presents for people. She had especially intimate relationships with my sister and both had enormous love for each other. She would spend weeks at her place in Islamabad and there she developed cordial personal contacts with her husband and all her children. She was most helpful in performing little things and everyone enjoyed her company.

The persons who really looked after her most of her life especially the later part of were the eldest 'mamoon' Niaz Ahmed and his wife - who also happened to be her own niece. Between the two of them they provided company and looked after her all material and medical needs. They would take her around to visit relatives and friends. They ensured that she was fed properly and many a times they would spend hours feeding her with a spoon. They were the comrades of long nights when she would be in distress and needed care. The mammany was in tears and was very distressed as Bibijan departed because she lost a mother, a mother in law, a khala and a friend in one person. She enjoyed very cordial relationships with all their daughters whom she had actively helped in bringing up. She had very warm relationship with their husbands and children.

My eldest Khala had a special relationship with her. Off and on, she would bring her home and provide her company and love. She looked up to her as a mother, friend and adviser. My khala was most genuinely worried about her well being and health. All her children were very fond of Bibi jan and she had a very special place for all of them in her heart. No wonder that Hafsa came running from Karachi, Saad from Quetta, Fahd from

Dubai and Wasay from Karachi to participate in her funeral and pay their final respects.

She tried her level best to keep the family intact and tried to protect them under her wings. Her most favourite was the youngest Khala and her children, whom she had brought up as a very young kid. My youngest Khala, a grand mother in herself, was wailing and crying on her departure. Bibijan would start missing her after every few days and would insist on visiting her house. Bibijan had a very soft corner for the youngest Mamoon Wiqaruddin. She was very fond of him and his children. She was always worried about Salahuddin Mamoon's health and well being. She was always there to look after him when he needed some one around. His son Ali, was her favourite and they got along very well.

Allah Subhanu Taala has His own ways of blessing His beloved people. Though she had a protracted long illness but she had preserved intellect, hearing and sight till the end. She always prayed for a 'smooth and painless' transition so as not to burden any one and she finally received the invitation of Allah Subhanu Taala without any distress and pain. When she died, it was raining all day since morning but the rain stopped at her namaz janaza and burial so that her final rites could be performed without any inconvenience.

MALIK SAAD – A LOVING FATHER

"Malik Saad was brave, honest and loving" every one would agree. The evening of 27th January was unduly dark and quiet. The atmosphere was somber and all eyes were wet! We lost some of our best police officers in an unfortunate event in the heart of the city. Many Police officers embraced Shahadat in uniform with their shoes on. Malik Saad, besides being an exemplary police officer and a role model for the younger generation, was also a wonderful father! Here is a glimpse of this wonderful person as depicted by Rahema Aman:

"Hello, Rahema bachey....how are you?" this was Saad uncle's way of greeting me. He would always hug me whenever we would meet. He treated me like a daughter and I loved him like a father. He always used to tell Mariam (his daughter) that we were like sisters. Just the thought of him leaving us did not even cross my mind. When my friend called me I didn't believe her. I then called Saad uncle's home. I was haring dinner at Silver Dragon. I made Aftab kaka repeat it thrice. And yet, I still didn't believe him. I started crying there. I refused to eat. People were staring but I didn't care. When I walked out a woman asked my mother why I was crying so much. My mother told her that Malik Saad's daughter is her best friend. When we were outside my dad held me, I just hugged him and started crying like crazy. In the middle of the road I kept on saying "Not

Mariam's dad especially that she had just left for USA. Anyone else's dad but not Mariam's dad. Not him." I kept on saying, " but Mariam really loved her father. She really loved him" I kept on thinking and the more I thought the worse I got. I kept on asking whether his body was intact. I asked whether Mariam knew. Seeing my condition my parents took me to Saad uncle's house. When I saw mummy (Mariam's grandma) there I could not help but to cry more. I didn't believe it and still don't believe it and will never believe it.

Saad uncle was an extremely jolly person who could get along well with anyone. Loving him was extremely easy as he remained happy and jovial all the time.. Mariam would always get up to greet her "ajee". Saalim and Qasim loved their father a lot and would crack silly jokes with him. Qasim really misses his father and you can see that in his eyes.He was an amazing father. One of my favourite topics to discuss with Mariam was 'dads'.

He got really worried when he found out that he was appointed as the 'top cop' and knew that people were expecting a lot from him. He would perform all his duties. He used to treat everyone equally and was honest with his work. At times I would talk to Mariam and she would say that she hasn't seen her dad all day. My reply to this would be, "welcome to my world!" as my father leaves home early morning and returns really late. At night he would wake all his children up and they would all watch Geo.

The house would never be dull as Saad uncle's jokes kept us laughing. He would always try to make his children laugh. He was the most lively one of the house. He would always crack really 'silly and lame' jokes which would not make us laugh but we would end up laughing one way or the other.

The best part was when he tried to operate a computer. He said, "Bachey Mariam, I've turned on the computer now what do I do to check my mail?" Mariam said that, "Now you click the button on the mouse." Instead of clicking the left one he clicked the right one. Frightened, he said, "Mariam bachay, I think I have downloaded a virus and its following the mouse."

He was fun to be around and played silly pranks on his children. He treated each one differently and they held a different and special place in his heart. Mariam would always joke around with her dad and not even once have I seen him angry. He had this special bond with all three of them. He used to call Mariam 'his princess'. Saalim and Qasim would wait around and always eat with him. They loved the same food (junk food)! Nothing 'yummy' could remain in the fridge for more than two hours.

It was always difficult to keep pace with him when we followed him for his evening walk in the park behind his home. He had specifically saved a few old songs in Mariam's Ipod. He would listen to it while walking. There, he would always have company. There would be people walking with him. He would be running fast as if he was trying to run away from them. It was a funny sight and it was worth watching.

He was incredibly nice to everyone. Aftab kaka, the cook was his favourite. He is my dad's patient and Saad uncle made sure that Aftab kaka would get better. He was ready to do anything as Aftab kaka has literally been like a family member. The minute I would enter the house I would meet Aftab kaka who'd tell Mariam that 'Rahema cardiology' is here. When I received the news about Saad uncle's from a friend I did not believe her. I called Aftab kaka and he confirmed my fear. When Aftab kaka saw me, he cried and kept on saying, "what will Mariam do?" He kept on asking me what would happen to Mariam. When the people came to pick Saad uncle's body up Aftab kaka looked at me and said, "Rahema, tell Mariam to come back... tell her that her father's funeral is taking place. Please Rahema, call Mariam!

Call her, please call her!" He kept on crying, which made me cry. This just shows that he was even nice to those working under him. Aftab kaka is a faithful person and he is faithful because of the way Saad uncle had looked after him.

He used to make sure everyone got what they wanted. Saad uncle made sure we got the tickets to the cricket match. He made sure we went in safely. He made sure there were guards all around us. He got us food there. He made sure that we went to 'Noori's concert. He got us the best seats at the concert and got us free tickets. He made sure all of us stayed happy.

He was so worried about his children that where ever Mariam went, at least two people would go with her. He made sure his daughter reached her destination safely. When Mariam's mum wasn't around he would call Mariam after every five minutes, asking the same questions again and again. He really cared about his wife. That's the reason why he let her go to America. Though he missed her a lot, but yet he let her go. When aunty took Mariam and Qasim with her, he cried a lot as he loved these two kids dearly. He loved them more than he loved himself. He would do anything for them.

I heard many people asking, "Who is this girl and why is she crying? How is she related to Malik Saad?" All I knew was that he was like my dad. Never did I think of him less than a parent. I still don't believe that he has gone. I know he is up there watching me like a proud parent. I really love him. I guess God took him because God wants all the good people for Himself. That just shows how much God loves the honest and the righteous ones! And we have a perfect example here. So here I am proudly saying that Malik Mohammad Saad is the best police officer and no one can reach his level of honesty. He was a great man and everyone will remember him.

In the end I would like to say, "Saad uncle I had promised Mariam that I would take good care of you but unfortunately God took you away! Secretly I feel that God has made Saad uncle happy by giving him heaven. I can see you smiling and

happy in Heaven. So all I would like to say is Mariam, Saalim, Qasim and I all four of us love you a lot!"

THE REAL FACTS OF LIFE

THE VEILED BUILDINGS!

Though we are used to women in veils but it was 'agonizing' to see the beautiful buildings of Peshawar wearing a veil. Most of the tall buildings on both sides of the road leading to the university town were covered with old 'shamyanas'. The new 'biggest' shopping mall of Asia –the Deans Mall was covered by tattered old 'shamyanas'. They seemed like a beautiful woman wearing rags! It was very depressing that the buildings which boasted of their beauty and seemed to be proud of their sparkling glass seemed nervous! Behinds the veils one could see the lugubrious face of the building with a very obvious question written all over them, "what is our fault and why are we being targeted?" The proud city of Peshawar was wearing a very depressed look and there was 'visible scare' in the ambience. People were scared to get out of their houses. Only in one day every thing seemed so different! An unruly mob lead by headless creatures seized by emotions and oblivious of reason and law took over the streets of Peshawar and played havoc with the sanctity and grandeur of the city.

Though we had a full day in the hospital but we received frantic phone calls the day before. 'Should we come for the angiography?' rang up a lady doctor from Abbotabad. "Should I take a chance and come to Peshawar to install the gamma camera?" the engineer rang up from Islamabad. "Will it be safe in the hospital?" enquired a fifty years old banker from Hayatabad. Honestly, I had no answers to these questions. But

the day before the strike I felt quite confident that nothing untoward will take place but of course I was 'very wrong and too optimistic'. Thousands of people who had appointments for their medical checkups had to return as the clinics were closed in the evening! Many patients had to endure restless night under the canopy of uncertainty because of these cancelled appointments!

How did the things get out of hands? Even a common man knew what will be the targets? Man in the street is fully convinced that when the government is fully determined nothing can go wrong! The example of marathon race in Lahore is quite appropriate. Not allowing a living soul to even cast a shadow near the route of a VVIP is another example. Only a couple of hundred of people and many of them in their teens paralyzed the whole city. They destroyed what ever they wanted at their own time and law enforcing agencies watched them helplessly. There are many questions but the answers may be very bitter and perhaps 'too revealing'.

"Where shall I search my blood as the whole city dwellers are wearing gloves" lamented Ahmed Faraz a long time ago, but is perhaps more appropriate for a situation like today. What happened to our otherwise sane people? Why did they start hitting themselves? Why did they choose such violent way to demonstrate their anger and disgust? Why teenagers were allowed to plunder and loot at their will? Why were these buildings, which bore the brunt of their madness, not offered adequate protection? Why the whole city was made hostage to a couple of hundred unruly people?

"If Jews and Indians want to destroy Muslims and Pakistan it is quite easy for them. They just have to publish a few more cartoons, and the Muslims and Pakistanis will burn themselves and also every thing else." Announce an SMS which was messaged by a friend. How true is this SMS and how silly we are! Charged with emotions we do not know what are we doing, what are we agitating for and above all who are the foes and who are the friends? How will it serve our cause if that car is burnt? If scores of motorcycles are burnt, what will happen to their young owners? "With a friend like this who needs enemies?" one wonders!

Though Peshawar streets are not the only ones to witness bloodbath and violence but the way it happened we all hang ours head in shame. We must seek forgiveness from our battered and veiled buildings which have no fault! We as a nation must learn how to register protest. We should educate our young generation that faced with a challenge, you do not hit your own heads with bricks! In this age and day our revenge should be more systematic and planned. Whom are we harming any way? Let's put our acts together and raise up to the occasion like an organized nation. Let us do some thing so that the enemy should repent and lick her own wounds rather than scoffing at our self inflicted wounds!

The Transition

Every thing is organised for tomorrow! The car has been selected, the power has been debated and decided, the colour has been agreed upon and the finances have been finalised. All this has been decided by the family in general and my son in particular. Suddenly I have been removed from the throne where I had the prerogative to make decisions and every one had to follow it. Slowly the reigns of power have slipped from my hands to the younger generation and I feel relieved!

My son decides which type of mobile phone I should carry around! He knows better, should it have a camera or not? It's not for me to decide whether it shall have an MP 3 player or not? What types of suits shall I buy, is no longer my right! Shall I drive my car myself or shall a chauffeur drive me around, is decided for me! Which functions shall I consider to attend, has to be decided for me! What food is good for me and what I shall abstain from, has become a matter for my family to debate and choose!

There is a change of roles with transition of power from one generation to the next! The responsibilities and obligations change! The citadel of decision making slowly changes and finds a new abode. The rules of business change and so does the high command. All this happens in a very natural way as if nothing has changed. The winds of change blow under the direction of time and it all appears 'natural' in the flow of time. The new hierarchy takes its place and 'this' becomes the order of the day!

There was a time when I used to write articles for my son. Then came a time when I used to correct his essays. Now is the time, when I have to concentrate really hard to understand what is hidden in his words. Today I would rather have him correct my articles. A total reversal of roles! Intellectually we both have been progressing but some where on the lane he covered the unknown distance by leaps and bounds. Some where on this path he overtook me, precisely when and how I do not know!

Such is the story of life, and the life goes on! Perhaps this is the biggest reality which stares into our eyes and still we cannot appreciate it or we do not want to face it. The oldies of today were the pride youth of yester years. The youth receives the baton and the race goes on! Seeds transform into young plants and then grow to newer heights and dimensions. But then the same strong tree – the pride of the garden slowly decays and gives way to the tides of time and one day bows to the decision of age and time!

'Change' is the only 'constant' in the world. Every thing has to change – some for better and some for worse! Those who anticipate 'changes' and ride on them, they achieve success and 'accomplish' the miracles. . Those, who learn to live with the realities of life and work accordingly, succeed in life. Others, who resist the inevitable changes and refuse to accept the verdict of time, end up empty handed.

Transition is the rule of the day. Power has to 'transit' and change hands. Authority has to change masters and it goes on from one to another. This applies at the level of individuals, society, and at larger scale like country and world. Rise and fall of kings and emperors bears testimony to it. Those who ruled the world with absolute power and authority, had to bow to the will of people and tides of time. Big empires of their time disintegrated and succumbed to the pressures of the economy and social justice. Nothing stayed the same for long; transition was the order and remains 'the order' of the day!

Should then the demi-gods of today not learn from the experiences of the past? Should they commit the same mistakes and reap the fruits of that? Should they not realise that the power they enjoy today is an ephemeral tide in the sea of time? And this will be lost in the ocean of time and become a lesson for

the coming generations. Again many will pay heed to the writings on the wall and others will chose to look through them. Hence some will follow the path of enlightenment and others will pursue the course of those who got lost and 'oblivion' became their destiny.

Betrayal of Body

"How could you betray me?" I ask rather incredulously and then as I look up to the sky I hear myself asking, "what wrong have I done to deserve this?" As I put my hand on my right upper abdomen and feel the hard mass I muse, "only if you had not invaded my body I would have been perfectly well!" "Why did open your doors to the foreign invaders without my consent?" I ask a vital part of my body - liver. After all you do have a right to ask or more aptly reprimand a part of your body which 'revolts' against you!

The news of 'developing cancer in liver', in spite of wrapped in all the possible polite words and promises for a 'near cure' because of recent advances, was neither easy to swallow or digest. 'Why? Why? Why?' my brain was being incessantly hammered. "How did it happen? Why did I not realise before? Could I have prevented it?" and many such questions, half phrased and half looking for words, kept echoing in the mind. All questions looking for answers that nobody has or shall ever have! This was like a storm that hit my body unannounced or like an earthquake which purloined the treasures of my life without any premonition.

My liver reminded me of the 'traditional beloved' who for unknown reasons severes the ties of love and determines to take revenge on you. The wounds are deep but the irony is that one cannot even protest. After all how can you raise hue and cry against the treachery of your own self? With whom can you

share the deep anguish arising from the 'deceit' of your own body? This opened the floodgates of old forgotten poetry of Urdu composed in the memory of 'perfidious beloved'. Starting from the great Ghalib, that he composed on the demise of his nephew especially the most famous couplet where he addresses the angel of death. One verse led to another and then yet to another one and this started and continued like a web which had no start and no end. The comic relief provided by the poetry proved to be an evanescent tide as I touched my right abdomen and felt the hard mass reminding me of the 'grim prognosis' and the limited time in my store.

I heard similar questions being asked from 'heart' by a young patient, father of two toddlers, who had a heart attack recently. The gentleman shuddered to draw any plans for the future as the very basis of all the plans - 'sound health' was the missing link. He wondered what would happen as the future unfolds more for him. Would he ever be able to lead a normal life? Would he be able to support his family and his parents? Would he ever be able to buy that 'gold set' his wife so ardently desired? Would he be around when his son appears for matric examination?

The patient on bed number ten was restless in his bed, the pain was simply unbearable! The blood supply to his right leg had been severed due to a clot dislodged from his heart. Whom does he blame, the heart who dispatched the 'unwanted clot' to the leg or his own leg for 'accepting' the guest without his authorisation? Undoubtedly this is the most severe pain a body has to endure, but why did this happen and why did it happen to him? He failed to understand that the pain was not decreasing and why was it not responding to pain killers? He could not even bear the thought that one day he may have to lose his leg and he would need support to walk around. He failed to accept that 'walking' which was his natural right at one time will become the 'biggest luxury' at another time!

What do you do when your own body conspires against you? Or as a poet said it nicely, 'the very essence of life - the props start giving way'. Whom do you blame when the boat you are riding starts rocking? What happens when the ground that is holding you starts quivering and splits under your feet? I wonder with my eyes wet and heart racing! What shall I do?

Consult this doctor, seek an opinion from a doctor from Islamabad, contact a doctor in USA or conduct a search on the internet? Yes I will do all that but what next? What can I do when my own body is at revolt against me, when my own self is bent upon destroying my body? What am I? Whom shall I side with, the destroyer or the one being destroyed? Shall I be mourning the loss or dance with joy with the victories of the invaders?

Drowned in the ocean of uncertainty and sorrow I look for some drops of water to partially relieve my thirst. I look for some breeze to put down the flames razing my body. I eagerly look forward to see some friendly figure to console me. I need something to pacify my bitterly agitated soul. I implore for some peace of mind. I request some one to hold my hand! I want some one to tell me that these things do happen in this life! I want to be reassured that having passed through his hardship I shall have a better reward in the life here after! I need some straw to catch on. But why do I need straws, and drops when I have You as my protector and my every thing. I want to hide in Your benevolence away from this ugly world and sleep under the canopy of Your Kindness for good. For nothing happens in this world without Your consent and I very humbly submit to Your Will!

Betrayal of Pen

As a doctor we spend our lives among the people, who have been condemned to various illnesses and have to bear the consequences of uncommitted sins. Many a times, we have to deliver verdicts which might sound most horrifying and perhaps announced in monotone without any emotions. Try telling a young girl that she has an advanced heart problem and she should not get pregnant. The social repercussions of it besides emotional backlash are understandable. Divorce, second marriage, adoption are the options entertained by the husband and the mother in law. Suicide, depression and separation are the options left to the poor wife. But why did she have to bear the brunt of some aberration of genes, inflammation or immunological problem? All this is beyond the comprehension of the lady and the in laws as well!

One of the most difficult times of my career was to dissuade a father to send his son to a medical college. The student was an eighteen years old six feet tall boy who was very polite and had a pleasant personality. But, he had a very large heart and had developed heart failure. He used to find it extremely difficult to carry out the normal chores of life. He had to plan to go to the bathroom, as even an effort of that magnitude would result in severe shortness of breath. His father was an ambitious person and like most of the fathers, he wanted his son to be a 'Mesiah'. The father used his connections and earned a 'reserved' seat for his son. His son had to be admitted to the hospital before

admission to medical college, as he could not tolerate the extra burden and bid adieu to this transient abode. There was a unique interplay of ambitions, emotions and stark realities. The son knew his limitations but the father was over optimistic and pursued his ambitions, which resulted in rather earlier exit of his son. Who was right and who was wrong?

I can never forget Sabira, a petit young girl, who always had a smile to answer all my queries. She had an immensely charming and sincere smile but her eyes used to be filled with tears. An apparently normal face would become asymmetrical and distorted as she would try to smile. Her smile had been distorted as the paralysis would prevent the angles of mouth to be retracted equally. As a young child she had severe leakage of a valve of heart but she kept struggling with it. Even at eleven years of age she was darling of the family and would be referring patients to me with a small chit. She had taken upon herself to look after every one and it amused me that people actually went to her for advice. She had to undergo heart surgery at the age of twelve. This improved her effort tolerance and she started discovering new 'pleasures' in life like going to a park or wedding. As the luck would have it, she was afflicted with a major paralysis, which rendered her right side of body totally immobile and purloined her of speech. In spite of all her miseries, she would always smile but I could feel unlimited miseries behind it. Though I would always encourage her, God knows, it was heart breaking to see her in that condition. Why did she have to go through all the miseries? First a heart problem, second a major a surgery, third a stroke and then recurrent chest infections and succumbing to all this at the age of fourteen. I have no answer to all these questions!

Hameed was a forty old banker who was brimming with health till he had a heart attack. His heart attack was very severe, resulting in a large portion of the muscle not capable of pumping. This lead to heart failure, and he would become short of breath on minimal effort. A clot formed in the immobile area and dislodged to brain. This caused a stroke leading to paralysis of his left side. A series of chest infections rendered him very weak and confined to bed. From a hero he was rendered practically to a 'zero' in a fortnight.

Though as doctors, we may be seen announcing very important 'verdicts' without emotions but in the heart of heart we feel the 'ache' and share that 'ache' with our patients. We may not demonstrate our emotions in public and shed tears but we have a sensitive heart that feels the miseries of our patients. We do develop 'emotional ties' with many of those who visit us frequently. It hurts us deep down to see our patients suffering and more so deteriorating in spite of all our efforts.

Many patients believe in doctors having superhuman powers. Some patients firmly believe in the 'healing touch' and some assert the 'prophetic Shifa'. How limited our powers are, and how helpless we can be, only we realize and know! No doctor will ever make a tall claim in the right frame of mind. The more learned the doctor is, the more he realizes the inadequacies of medicine. As a doctor accumulates more experience, he realizes the limitations doctors have in the practice of medicine. As one learns about remedies to many problems, it also dawns upon him of many other problems to which one has no answer. Medicine is nothing but careful application of scientific knowledge but the main problem is that diseases do not present and follow the same pattern in all the patients. Writing a prescription is only one step, the response to this prescription is determined by the Almighty Allah Subhanu Taala.

'Betrayal of body' was an attempt to illustrate the point that any person can be afflicted with any problem and it can happen to any one at any time. . Though my pen betrayed me and did not reveal the whole story, but the aim was to see the things from other side of the fence as well. There is no court of appeal and one cannot complaint. Whom do you complaint to, any way? The only comfort lies in accepting the things as they are! And still be thankful to God, that it could be worse than that. Till that time when the normal pleasures of life do not become a 'luxury', when a person can walk, talk and think normally, one should be greatly indebted to the Almighty and always remember that these treasures can be taken away without any premonition.

WHEN TOMORROW COMES!

It is just like another day! Hurriedly I jump from the bed early in the morning, rush to bathroom, get ready, gulp a cup of tea and make my way to the hospital. The time to watch is eight o clock as our morning sessions start sharp at time and one cannot afford to be late! As I go through the routine I take every thing for granted. I expect to awake alive and healthy, be in my senses and have the strength to carry out the day routine. How many things can go wrong and in so many ways one never realises!

As I enter the gate of the hospital, I see an old man struggling to walk and cross the road. With great effort and persistence he succeeds to cross the road. I remind my self that what has become an up hill task for him now was part of his routine. It would have not even occurred to him in the past that crossing road would become a challenge at a certain stage. As I enter my block I see an elderly gentleman climbing stairs with the help of railing and a stick with much difficulty. I realize that only a few years ago this gentleman would have been running up and down the same stairs with ease. What was a pleasure and a routine at one time has now become a 'test' of physical fitness.

In the ward I see an old lady who is lying in bed and finds it difficult to even toss around in the bed. It is difficult for her to walk unaided and she needs help in the bathroom. I look at her and try to discover the young twenty years old lady who would have been full of charm and style. She would have had her own set of rules and protocol. And now here she lies without any

severe physical illness but worn down with advanced age! She is physically incapacitated and has to follow the commands of others rather than dictating her own terms.

I see an old man in my clinic presenting with confusion and loss of memory. Dementia –loss of memory is a serious affliction that may be a blessing in disguise for some. This exonerates one from the social shackles and sets one free of worldly norms. But this poses a big problem to the people looking after that person. As one loses the insight one does not even appreciate one's own identity and as such one can wander away. One can cause severe bodily harm without even realizing it. Though dementia does not strictly follow chronological age and there may be many of octogenarians with preserved intellect and wit yet it is a common occurrence in old age. This eighth act of life, where human being reverses back to child hood, with loss of insight and wisdom, is indeed very painful both physically and intellectually.

Worse may be a scenario, where intellect is preserved, insight is retained and memory functions properly but the body refuses to obey the commands of brain. The person is unable to move and cannot look after himself. Consider a gentleman in late eighties with crisp memory and preserved sense of humour who is confined to bed -unable to eat, and drink without help and needs aid for even attending to calls of nature. To draw attention of attendants a system of mobile door bell is devised but at a later stage the fingers lose the strength to press the button! A collar mike is attached to the bed side with speakers in the kitchen and this works very well for some time till the person can say a few words or at least moan and groan loud enough to attract attention. But later this system can not work as mike would fall off and could not transmit the low volume 'protest' and 'complaint'. Try to understand the 'helplessness' of the person who has all the physical components which used to work fine and normally, but would not obey the commands and refuse to move!

The age of 'san teeth, san eyes and san ears' is inevitable, but those of us who reach that age should be thankful to God for most of the people may not be able to make it. Life is treacherous and may alter its way at any juncture but even if she stays faithful, the end may not be all that pleasant. But this is what life

is about! And this is what exactly one should be prepared for-mentally and physically!

Physical disability and loss of strength lead to a lot of psychological problems. Physical and economical independence of yester years and strength of decision making withers away under the decaying physical vigor and economical dependence. Inability to make decisions and implement them leads to agitation and tension. This creates a source of confrontation and in-house fights. Most of 'old folks' are by and large unhappy and bitter for not receiving adequate 'returns' on their life long investment of time and material in relation ships. And when it comes to children, then it becomes a different story as to whom to complaint and whom to turn to?

One often wonders as to what is the reality – the yesterday when I was a strong young boy, today when I can perform most of my chores with ease or tomorrow which has yet to come and when I will be incapacitated and dependent on others? What shall I believe in? The past which seems so distant and at times 'misty'; the present which seems so real that it appears the only moment of truth or the future which is sure to come and which is perhaps the unavoidable truth. There is crisis of credibility, in what to believe and what not to?

Old age is a reality and we are all treading on that path, may not be by choice but out of compulsion. Most of us pray for a well preserved and independent old age. A dignified era before transiting the transient abode is the dream of every one. Can anything be done to minimize the damage and preserve the sanctity of old age? Two simple principles have to be followed if possible: preservation of physical fitness and economical independence. In the context of physical fitness important aspects are preservation of normal weight and regular walk to 'keep' things in motion. Optimal treatment of whatever ailments one is afflicted with remains important. Economical independence is very important especially with new winds blowing in our society. Some thing in the kitty for a rainy day is very imperative. But above all what really makes the difference is what is ordained in the book of fate. Perhaps sincere prayers and a close contact with Allah Subhanu Taala makes all the suffering bearable for a good cause that is Jannat.

Not All But Some!

"Doctor, why do I have pain in my little finger after I have food with achar and lassi and then lie on my left side?" I scratch my head and look for possible association of food, achar, lassi and lying on left side. My hard disk gives a blank answer to this query. The question in itself is vague and without any logic. "Since I saw you last, I have developed pain in my right little finger which gets worse after a cup of tea and samosa," informs Mrs Qadir. All she had from the clinic was some medication for high blood pressure and relaxation. And these medicines could not cause anything like this by any stretch of imagination.

"OK, lady what brings you to us?" is one of our pet opening sentences. "I did not come on my own accord rather I have been pushed by my relatives to seek your medical advice," she retorts rather brusquely. "How are you feeling today?" I ask as a matter of fact question to break the ice. "Why shall I be visiting you if I was feeling well," she answers back hiding her tears and holding back her emotions. "What is wrong with you?" another 'starter' which does not deserve a reply like, "will I not be sitting in your chair if I had known what is wrong with me".

"Doctor, your medicine had no effect on me at all and I am just about the same as I was before," commented Mr Adil eleven months after the last visit. "How is your pain in chest and how far can you walk now a days?" I ask feeling quite guilty about his not getting any better. "Well, I have no chest pain and on a

good day I can walk a couple of miles." "If you can walk for a mile then you have done very well. But you said you are not feeling any better?" I ask him again. "What I mean is that when I take drugs I am OK but when I stop drugs then I have these problems," he replies. "Who had assured you that you will take drugs for a week and you will be cured. You have a life long disease and perhaps you have to take drugs for the rest of your life," I tried in vain to counsel him and reveal the ugly facts of life.

"Doctor, I have this pain on right side which travels to left arm and then back of neck and at time radiates to the back of right leg. I have been to hundred of doctors and you are my last hope. I do not want to do any more tests and I have forgotten all my old tests at home. Please give me some special therapy that shall cure me in one day and I don't have to go any where again," pleads fifity years old banker Mr Kareem. "Do you think I am a magician or some 'peer'? Or do you imagine that I have this touch of Christ that I will touch you and you will get better. This is a real world and we need to diagnose your ailment with the help of tests before we can prescribe you any medicine. If you want to get treatment you have to follow our protocol other wise the choice is yours!" I put it rather bluntly.

"The pain starts early morning from left side of abdomen, builds up to centre of the back and then travels to front of left leg before going on to right side of the neck. This has increased since I saw you last," he confides and says in a tone as if I was personally responsible for his sufferings and pain. "But you did not say a word about this pain last time?" I ask him as I glance through my old notes. "Oh yes I forgot about it but the pain is very severe and it is present all the time!" he adds looking very worried and tense.

"I have to come from very far flung place and it is difficult for me to get a prior appointment. Please give me your special card or write some thing on your prescription which allows me to enter your clinic without any appointment," such 'crooked' requests are becoming exceedingly common as people realize that they have to get an appointment and then wait for their turn like every one else. I have to listen to such requests at least eight to ten times a day. My response is, "if you really want to come and enter the clinic without waiting and taking a prior

appointment there is only one way!" I whisper in a low tone. They get encouraged and excited and ask, "and what is that?" "When you come next time, bring a loaded gun and that ensures your certain entry!" I add lowering my voice further. I hope they realize the absurdity of their demand and no body takes this advice seriously.

Most of the times when we finish our clinic we have many small little gifts brought by our dear poor patients. Some bring eggs, some bring chicken and some like to bring handkerchief and soaps. Most of us believe that this is our real 'earning'. Small little things which may not be expensive but which express love and regard are what we value the most. But then there are people who would always complain. They always have to be unhappy about some thing. If they cannot lay their hands on anything else they will complaint about the length of time they had to wait for, or inability to get an appointment on phone or the money they had to spend on hiring the vehicle to visit the clinic. Some will complain as to how long they have to continue the drugs for? Or they will make a big case that the medicines he is taking are very expensive. Some of them, while confessing to marked improvement in their clinical condition, will complaint about the number of tablets. My usual response to this 'lots of tablets' is, "you reduce your ailments and I will reduce the number of tablets."

We have to put up with all types of patients. Most of our visitors are very nice, well meaning and humble. At times some prove to be very demanding and rather difficult to handle! Some are difficult to penetrate and communicate! They start with the 'guess game' and are really expert in 'you are the doctor and not me' game. They hold on to all information and do not tender anything voluntarily. Yet there are some more with sadistic attitude who enjoy 'rubbing' in things. They have this particular knack of making the other person feel guilty of all their sufferings. If they have pain its doctor's fault, if they missed their transport that too is doctor's mistake and if some one gave them wrong medicine that too is included as a crime committed by the doctor. All ills and wrongs are due to fault of others.

But despite every thing we love our patients and are genuinely concerned about their well being. Most of our patients are very kind to us and we cherish the bond we form. We take

great pride in the confidence the patient places in us and we try our utmost to come up to their expectations. In our practice we have to face some 'odd characters' but that perhaps is the part of the game and have to be accepted as such.

THE SMALL KINDNESS

(Surat Al Ma'un) CVII

There has been a ceaseless attack on Islam from all corners and sometimes from inside by the so-called, modern and enlightens on various grounds. In the biggest miracle – the Holy Quran most of the instructions to the believers are on 'human rights' or perhaps more aptly 'human dignity'. Islam is not talking about some mind-boggling philosophy but it is highlighting some very basic principles, stressing on human respect and caring for society. There has been more stress on respecting fellow human beings regardless of religion, creed and sex than anything else. Islam was instrumental in the older times to discard all the discriminations against the oppressed.

This small chapter from the Quran should be an eye opener for all! This is one of the last ten small surats of Quran Shareef, which lays stress on the basic codes of life highlighting how much emphasis Islam places on human dignity. The start of the chapter is very dramatic and emphatic. It equates the person who does not have the qualities mentioned later as a person who is refuting the basics of religion. What I have tried to do here is to give literal, accepted translation in bold italics of an ayat followed by a little explanation.

Hast thou seen him who denies the Requital?

Denying requital is like denouncing the very basic of religion. This is a very important tenet which forms the basis of faith. This

per se distinguishes a person with faith from non-believers. Allah Subhanuhu Taala in order to emphasise on the qualities, being mentioned later on, makes these qualities as the criteria of faith. In essence a person cannot be a true Muslim unless he has the ensuing traits. To qualify to be a Muslim though faith in Allah Subhanuhu Taala is a priority but much before anything else he has to have love and be kind to the fellow human beings and specially to underprivileged people. This type of a start is peculiar to situations where Allah Subhanuhu Taala wishes to make it appear as very important.

It is he pushes away the orphan and does not urge the feeding of the poor.

The prior ayat is like an introduction to this ayat. All along in Islam the emphasis has been on human rights. Islam encourages love and abhors people who are not kind to the fellow human beings. Islam denounces the person who is hard hearted, and treats people with harshness and roughness. Here 'orphan' means all under privileged people. A person who does not feed the hungry, and does not urge people around him on such acts of kindness is being condemned. They are the people who are negligent of rights of their fellow human beings. A 'hadith' further drives this point home as narrated by Sahl bin Sa'ad: the Prophet (PBUH) said, "I and the person who looks after an orphan and provides for him will be in Paradise like this, putting his middle and index fingers together."

So woe be to such performers of prayers, as are heedless of prayers.

Islam believes in the purity of deeds and denounces hypocrisy. It urges people to pray regularly and that too from the core of the heart with sincerity and dedication. Evil as it is the negligence of rights of people, far worse is the negligence of the rights of Creator. Here a reference is being made to people who are either not regular in prayers, those who do not concentrate during prayers or those who do not fulfil all the obligations of prayers. All along in Islam the emphasis has been on the 'Niat' -the purpose behind the action. The physical actions of prayers must be accompanied by sincerity of purpose and it should be performed with all honesty and humility.

They who would be seen.

Those who act ostentatiously implying that they want to be seen. They are doing something to be seen by others so that people think well of them. The purpose of their actions is not to please Allah Subhanuhu Taala but to appear to be among the 'good' people of society. There could not be a better example whereas the actions are the same but because of different purposes one is being condemned and the other is being encouraged.

and who withhold even the common necessaries to others.

Islam is a practical religion and teaches us the practical codes of life. It encourages people to live together in a society and enhance love by sharing things. Islam condemns people who do not help each other while living in close neighbourhood. Such people do not believe in sharing things that are common necessities like salt, sugar and water. If people do not help each other with basic essentials how will they sacrifice at a higher level? This ayat lays down the basis of a welfare society and perhaps cannot be put in a more exquisite way.

Look at the beauty of language and the style of narration. In strongest words Allah Subhanuhu Taala urges all of us to look after the under privileged people. We have to be kind to them and look after their needs. Special emphasis has been laid on feeding the poor. The society has to ensure that no body is hungry and have enough to meet their immediate needs. A person is doomed if his neighbour goes to bed hungry, the onus is not on the hungry person to come and ask for food rather it is on that person to ensure that his neighbour has enough to eat. Most of us do not have in-depth knowledge of Islam but we all should realise that it is incumbent upon us to enhance our understanding by giving it more time and putting in more concerted effort.

In the Quran, on more than seven hundred occasions there has been mention of prayers. But at this junction Allah Subhanuhu Taala condemns special type of people who pray but whose aim is not to please Allah Subhanuhu Taala but who would like to be seen as 'pious' and 'good'. Sincerity and purity of purpose is the main essence of Islam as there is no role for hypocrisy. Islam

believes in the 'truth' and 'honesty'. All actions have to be backed by honest determination and purpose. The inspiration has to be on solid and strong footing.

Whereas the Quran does not dwell in detail about how to pray and fast, it gives all fine points about social interpersonal relations. In unambiguous words the Quran urges us to have love for unprivileged people in particular and every one in general. Love can only be cultivated when we try to fulfil each other's needs and be helpful in their hours of stress. Many a time there may be temporary shortage of essentials in any house. Islam reckons it a duty of the neighbours to help each other and share basic essentials. Of course if the base is strong, a tall building can be built on that. Similarly if neighbours share small basic commodities this can pave way to the sharing of other things at higher levels. Sharing provides basis of a close network and a society where love and kindness are shared.

To conclude, contrary to what some may believe Quran has a universal message for all the followers which is simple and easy to understand. It emphasizes the respect of human beings and urges us to help each other and establish a 'true welfare society'. It lays stress on love and respect for all specially the unprivileged section of society.

PUNCTUALITY – A LOST VIRTUE

There I was, feeling immensely guilty for being late by five minutes. I hurriedly entered the office looking at my watch and trying to 'genuinely' blame the uncontrolled and mismanaged traffic on the road for the unwanted and unfortunate delay. The gentleman sitting across the table looked perplexed! I introduced my self and narrated that I was called for an extremely important meeting to start exactly at nine. He casually looked at the heap of papers in front of him and shook his head in negative. I found it difficult to interpret his vague gesture! I pushed the piece of paper I received from his office in front of his eyes. He looked at it in 'disbelief' and nodded his head- what ever it meant! With a wry smile on his face he asked me to take a chair in an adjoining room as the officer concerned had not reported to the office by then. "It might take a few minutes," he warned me as I was leaving his office. It turned out to be a 'most painful' hour as I sat in the waiting room having gone through the paper – head news, unimportant news, columns, letters to the editor, advertisements and later revising the important ones! I was cursing my self and the system and wondered as to how many things I could have done in that hour! How many patients I could have seen, angiograms I could have performed and how much 'debulking' I could have done for my file work?

Interviews were scheduled for nine in the morning and the instructions were to reach the office fifteen minutes in advance

to be briefed by the Chairman. The chairman was known for his punctuality and discipline. There I was five minutes before the time only to find that the office was being unlocked and the tables were being cleaned. First of all, there was no one at reception and then 'one' of the clever chowkidars looked at me and guided me to wait in the waiting room. On realizing that I was there not to be interviewed but to take interview, his behaviour changed and offered me a seat in one of the offices. But I had to wait for thirty minutes before the start of interviews.

A meeting was scheduled in the office of the secretary at 11AM 'prompt'. I had to attend someone's funeral but I postponed that to attend this important meeting. Cutting down on my ward round and missing my outpatient clinic, I made way to the secretariat. I tried to reconfirm the timing of the meeting by ringing up the relevant quarters. As I reached the office 'huffing and puffing' I found the meeting room vacant. On further enquiries, I found that the meeting was postponed and 'attempts' were underway to inform the 'expected participants'.

It said it clearly, 8.30 pm sharp. I checked the date, "yes it is today!" Where did I go wrong? The place is right, the date is correct and the time is due so where is every one else? It took two hours for the host to appear at the scene, let alone the guests. The host was later complaining that some of the guests were late even by his standards! Going to marriages at the correct time is a sign of living in 'fool's world' or more correctly and specifically diagnostic of 'insanity'. Many of doctors while checking for the intellectual status and inter human relationship ask pertinent questions like, "do you attend marriage functions in time?" An affirmative reply can affix an undeniable stamp of insanity.

Many of our patients ask for an urgent appointment as they are not feeling well. After trying to squeeze them in our busy schedule we later find them arriving late by hours. If we dare to ask why, we have to hear answers like, "Oh, an aunt was celebrating her birthday and we had to go there." Or some thing more silly, "we had visitors and we could not leave them alone." "Our car broke down and we had to get a lift," - all lame excuses. While asking for an urgent appointment they stress on the gravity of situation on phone or otherwise, but they

completely forget about the importance of time and punctuality later on.

Some of our patients request for an urgent appointment for a procedure like angiography or angioplasty. Once the appointment is made more often than not they will come late, not by minutes but by hours. Perhaps most annoying are the excuses they forward, "we thought you meant eleven am and not nine am." What about this written instructions?" I ask them. "No, actually a nurse told us to come late," the lame excuses continue.

Blessed be the immaculate system in Cadet College that even now six o clock means six o clock. It does not mean five minutes before or five minute later. If the meeting time is six o clock I have to make sure to be there a few minutes earlier to ensure 'promptness'. The habit is so deeply ingrained that in spite of learning my lessons at more than hundred of occasions I have not been able to change myself.

Most of us have no respect for time and 'punctuality' is an unknown virtue! It is part of our social practice to be late. Rather it depends on the grade and the social status. Higher the grade and social status the more one is entitled to be late and cause inconvenience for every one else. All meetings start late because the 'presiding officer/chairman' has something more important to do! Eight o clock is eight clock and it should be respected and treated like eight o clock. We should understand the difference between eight and nine o clock and try to be 'prompt' in time. The worst thing that has crept in our society is that when we want to invite people for nine, we write seven and expect them to be there by the desired time. This is like legalizing the crime and this 'delay' period will keep on increasing. Now that we have lost the count of minutes, surely it will be followed by hours and the day is not very far where days will lose their importance too.

CAN YOU?

I came across two poems written by a young poet who just appeared for his O levels. One of them is very inspiring and the other is full of pessimism. The young poet is in search of truth and is trying to draw a thick line between what is right and what is wrong. Indeed an uphill task but then youth has its own exuberance - it has its own plus points and blind spots. Later in life after facing innumerable hardships, one is forced to conclude that the line dividing the wrong and the right may not be very thick and it is not always possible to follow them to letter. I wish to share these poems and more importantly the spirit behind them.

Can You

Can you find a drop of sincerity in the ocean of hypocrisy?
Can you find a gem of integrity in the black rocks of dishonesty?
Can you find an answer of peace in the riddles of brutality?
Can you find a literate in the masses of illiteracy?
Can you find a scent of originality in the odor of impurity?
Can you find a leaf of reality in the autumn of uncertainty?
Can you find a ray of piety in the darkness of blasphemy?
Can you find a tree of equality in the desert of disparity?
Can you find a rose of generosity in the thorns of poverty?
Can you find a second of truth in the centuries of fallacy?
Maybe, maybe not…

But you should not cease to strive for 'truth and right' in your life!
(Wahaj Aman)

Life is treacherous and people looking for sincerity and integrity in the ocean of hypocrisy are very few and far. Are they looking for the 'right stuff' in the 'right market' or they are looking for a rare commodity in a place where it does not exist? Is it really correct to ask for all this and not becoming a role model yourself. It is just not right to ask before you deliver.

It hurts a lot when one imagines that young people who have yet to enter in the practical world perceive this world as 'autumn of uncertainty', 'desert of disparity' and a place full of 'riddles of brutality'. The heart sinks on imagining that though we, who have passed the prime, used to cling to some 'fancier dreams' and a better tomorrow, our 'fast forward' youth is very realistic and has no illusions about the future.

Dreams shape our future and when one is purloined of dreams, one is left high and dry. Life seems very empty and there remains no challenge and charm in it. "Kill me but do not deprive me of my sweet dreams," said some one. Dreams of the future and a better tomorrow are our most precious asset. One can lead a life in the hope of a better and prosperous world but what if the cruel world does not even allow you to have such dreams- that too in your youth.

Young men are asking for 'equality', 'roses of generosity', 'truth' and 'piety' in the darkness of this world. Whereas it is very heartening that these values are still honoured by our youth. It is exceedingly painful to realise that the youth even in their younger years have found that these are rather rare traits in our society.

I shudder with horror on this rather 'scientific' and matter of fact approach of the youth of today. They can see through things. We have to do something change the course that we are following blindly. Let's sow some new seeds of hope which can develop into sturdy and tall trees so that tomorrow we can pluck some nice fruits from it and rest under their shade. The following poem gives a clear message to all of us. It shows us the real mirror showing how deep this pessimism has ingrained in our youth.

The Dead Leaf

It was getting hard to hang on,
My support was giving way,
Where had all the strength gone?
What was happening to me?
My colour was changing,
My vision was blurring,
The green in me was vanishing,
I was falling but nobody cared,
I was getting weak,
I was dying of thirst,
My fellow leaves were in the same state,
All were musing, "who would die first?"
Suddenly the wind blew
Pushed me, and carried me to my worst fear
Everything seemed dark
And I knew my end was not too far,
Slowly but surely I floated
To the ground with thorns
They were sharp and painful
Frightened, I started to mourn
I looked up at the sky
I was too weak to cry
and I saw the angel of death
I died breathing my last breath

(Wahaj Aman)

EARTH QUAKES - WHAT NEXT?

More than eighty seven thousands people have succumbed to the deadly earthquakes. This is an official figure and the real figures may be more than that, perhaps close to hundred thousand. Cold weather, snow, and diseases like diarrhea and chest infections may claim another significant number after the initial toll. If these figures double up then it will increase to more than 150,000 lives lost in Tsunami disaster and 12000 claimed in Katrina hurricane. This is by far the biggest and the 'ugliest' disaster that has struck Pakistan. Earth quakes in hilly areas leave behind much more grievous injuries and present an arduous and difficult job for the relief workers for evacuation of the victims and their rehabilitation.

According to a preliminary Damage and Needs Assessment report prepared by World Bank, Asian Development Bank and United Nation Development Programme more than five billion dollars are required for the relief and reconstruction for the areas hit by earth quakes. This will include reconstruction, revival of livelihood and relief efforts. How much aid has already been promised and delivered to Pakistan? Compared to the generous support witnessed during Tsunami and Katrina, the support for the earth quake victims at international level has been miserly and disappointing. Pakistan has received $630 million so far. There may be many factors for this reluctance on the part of donors but nothing substantial. The major stumbling block could be the credibility of the system to deliver the aid to the needy

ones due to lack of infra structure, coordination and planning but these problems can be surmounted with hard work and honesty.

Where as international community has taken a long time to recognize the gravity of the problem and in offering the help, the response of nationals of Pakistan has been salutary and far beyond seen any where else in the world. Right from the rugged mountains of north to the shores of Arabian Sea the response has been tremendous. Youth played the major role in mobilization of the resources, collection of donations and distribution of relief goods. We will never invent an instrument to measure the true spirit of these angels of life and love. No words can describe their enthusiasm, determination and hard work. Though lack of coordination may have reduced the over all impact of the relief work but their efforts need to be appreciated. This show of sympathy and love for the victims by their brothers and sisters is a great feeling and a good omen for our otherwise divided nation. The calamity has definitely brought the best in many of us.

Here is a poem written by a young girl Rahema Aman from O level, Beacon House Peshawar. This is a true reflection of how the young minds perceive the problem and implore us to do more for our brothers and sisters with unity and discipline.

Let's get together

Lets get together… be one,
Lets leave the differences between us,
Lets get united in the name of Pakistan,
We need to get together,
As the injured have to be treated,
Wounds have to be bandaged,
Dead have to be buried,
Orphans have to be fathered,
Temporary sheds have to be converted to homes,
Schools have to be rebuilt,
Life has to be given a new lease,

Work together and help others,
That should be our mission,
We should do it, together,
But what are we to do,
For this country lacks unity.
Please people, everyone, listen,
Male or female,
Youth or old,
White or black,
Rich or poor,
Literate or rustic,
Forget the dividing lines,
Leave these differences,
For our country needs us,
This is the only way…
To pay back our country,

So lets get united,
Lets face this trauma together,
For together we are an invincible force,
So buck up people, buck up Pakistanis,
We can do it,
Yes Pakistanis, we can do it,
We can put up brave faces,
And fight for our lives,
So all of you, do whatever you can do,
Do whatever is in your reach,
Yes I mean you Pakistanis,
For your brothers need you,
And most of all the country,
The place where you grew up,
The place which educated you,
The country which made you,

What you are today,
Don't you want to pay it back?
This is your chance,
A chance to be called,
A true, real Pakistani,
For we are proud Pakistanis,
Call us whatever you want to,
But to us we are the best.

(Rahema Aman)

CRAMMING VERSUS LEARNING

"Training is everything. The peach was once a bitter almond; cauliflower is nothing but cabbage with a college education."

(Mark Twain 1835-1910)

"Education has for its object the formation of character."

(Herbert Spencer 1888)

A decade ago there was no comparison between matric and O levels, most of the students will follow studies via conventional system and very few would opt for O levels. No doubt, students following conventional system worked very hard and eventually excelled in all fields at home and abroad. But something went wrong, somewhere on the way! Nowadays, the same system is being criticised and abhorred. Suddenly after fifty years we have realised that the system we have been following for five decades is corrupt and is not delivering what it supposed to deliver! Why and how did it happen? Who is to blame for it? The problem cannot be solved by switching over to O levels from Matric system/secondary school certificate!

Lets critically evaluate our education system. What are we offering our children at nursery? At the root level, the children are taught to cram up ABC and a few poems. We feel very proud and ask our children to recite these poems, without any comprehension in front of others. Is this education? Have we confined education to cramming up 'some verses' in Urdu, English or Arabic which a child does not understand? Are we not giving a very wrong message to our children? Unfortunately

we are telling our children that knowledge and education does not mean 'understanding' some thing, it means 'cramming'. The need for understanding and getting right concepts is not being emphasised. Will it not be more important and pertinent to teach these children more important things? More important things in life are as to how to cross road, brush teeth and talk to elders. I will be proud of a child who has learnt these fundamentals than memorised poems. They should be equipped with these basics to face this world. Emphasis should not be on cramming rather on building of concepts.

I remember, as a child, we used to have excellent textbooks and there used to be questions at the end of chapters. The idea was to go through the whole chapter, understand the essence of it and later answer those questions in your own words. The teacher made our job very easy! She would tell us, "the answer to first question is on page 12, paragraph 3, second line, omit the and replace with there and stop at fifth line before 'fair'." We used to love this teacher as she would not 'bother' us with teaching and we did not have to work hard in finding the answers. I was immensely distressed to find that the same mentality and attitude still prevails in our system and my children were taught exactly in the same way! With teachers like this even if you have the best books in the world and a fool-proof system of examination, how can you win?

In the primary schools you feel sorry for the little children carrying rather dragging bags double their size. Unless there is an unannounced policy of using these bags for weight lifting, I personally find it very annoying. At this level the emphasis should be on creative work, refinement of the basic traits, character-building, teaching of the Quran and usage of library. They should be given concepts – on how to be good human being and how to be a good Muslim. What are his rights and how should he pay back society by fulfilling his obligations. All we are doing at present is to make 'parrots' out of them who start pouring out whatever has been crammed.

It is of paramount importance to create and develop communication skills and there should be special efforts to boost their confidence by employing the latest techniques. No, I do not agree, you do not require sophisticated gadgetry or computers for 'all this' - all you require is educated, confident and dedicated teachers. Here we try to suppress them by unleashing indiscriminate brute force which shakes their confidence and lowers their self esteem.

A step ahead when they reach the colleges they are encouraged to become 'unbridled horses'. The only difference between a school and a college to them is that they have more freedom in college – freedom to bunk classes, to come to college without a bag and to arrive and leave the premises at their will. They are not made aware of the role they are being prepared to play in society in various positions. A college is like a springboard to various professional colleges and professions. Many experts feel very strongly that this two years bridge between school and professional colleges sojourn is totally unwanted and serves no purpose at all. All high schools should be upgraded to intermediate level so the flow of study and environment remains undisturbed let alone the hassle from pole to pillar for admissions. This will solve a lot of problems; a student will complete all his basic studies in one institution and then leave to join any profession and those who prefer pursue subjects of their interest. Emphasis should be on practical training and the number of seats and subjects offered should be in proportion of what are the demands of society. We need more programmers for software development, this subject should be encouraged. If there is increase in demand of automobile engineers, seats should be increased in that subject.

Our college education lacks inspiration and stimulation. It thrives on spoon-feeding and cramming. I guess its difficult to change the system with one stroke but at least we should appreciate what is right and what is wrong. Assignments should be given to students who should be encouraged to consult library or textbooks and these should then be discussed in classes. Instead of lecturers there should be discussions. I remember our lecturers pouring out their lectures, which we were supposed to write word for word. Honestly it was a communication between fingers and ears - brain was never allowed to interfere in this intimate relationship.

Cheating has become an inoperable cancer of our education system. Its roots are spreading everywhere, even to middle and primary school as this has become an accepted norm of getting through the examination. Tremendous developments have taken place in this field in our society. One has to salute the ingenuity of these pioneers for inventing so many methods involving high technology. Micro word copiers are being employed to reduce the size of the 'booties' and efforts are saved by making many copies at once. People have been using transmitters with earphones concealed in caps and aerials hidden in ties.

Computes have been employed for micro printing and storage and updation of data whenever required.

The most unfortunate aspect of this sordid affair is that students take it as a right to cheat. Many incidents involving physical assaults on invigilators have been reported in the press. At one time the students involved in cheating were despised but not any more it. This unfortunately is only one piece in the whole jigsaw puzzle of fraudulent measures employed in examinations. Others being 'paper hunt' like 'post processing' where examiners are approached and papers are either 'retaken' or are 'appropriately amended' and generously awarded for this 'extra effort'. A new business has set in by embezzlement at the central levels where a 'digit' game is played for an appropriate price. Those who burn midnight oil and invest hours of hard work are not paid back judiciously. Where as those who had good time enjoying life, benefit form extra-curricular and post-examination 'hard work'.

Introduction of 'entry test' has been a slap in the face and show of distrust on our system. The people at the helm of affairs of board examination should have protested against this and tendered resignation. There could not be another way of telling them that they are corrupt, their results are cooked up and we shall be conducting our own examination. This thing should have shaken the whole government. But it was ignored and passed as a trivial. Here we are witnessing the death of a fifty-year-old system and instead of taking it seriously we are pushing the things under the carpet.

I see a 'little light' at the end of the tunnel. Why are people going for O and A levels? May be a small minority of these students are planning to leave Pakistan and study abroad but most of these are going to study over here. It's heartening to see that there are still a lot of people in our society who want their children to be educated and not just earn degrees. There are still people who believe in the dignity of hard work and are willing to ask these students to work hard and prove their talents at international level. They have the guts to take up against this corrupt system and do not want to compare their children against those who earn their marks by illegal means. If parents and children are opting for another system in increasing numbers, the government should wake up to the realities of the day and must revamp the whole system.

What can be done about it? Indeed stringent action against defaulters – students, parents, teachers and examiners – seems

the right answer. But perhaps in the presence of so many defaulters at all levels, who will be the judge, who will be the prosecutor and who will be the accused? More so by changing over to O levels the problem cannot be solved. How many of our children can afford to pay the fee for this examination? How can we justify the colossal expenditure on our education system and administering examinations under so many boards? What are we churning out? Are we heading for a complete disaster?

I do not claim to be an education expert but this comes 'from the core of my heart' being an end user and father of students. Any disease requires proper assessment and later treatment. This disease is 'malignant' and has extremely poor prognosis, the treatment has to be effective, bold, timely and well-planned. This has to be nothing short of radical surgery. This surgery shall involve the 'primary' education, and the 'secondaries' which perhaps have spread to all the parts or systems.

The need of the day is to change the whole system and introduce a new method of examination involving tests at regular intervals based on multiple choice questions where the contents are more important than the format. Regular tests will ensure smooth flow of academics as teachers will have to teach before administering tests and students will at least bless the class rooms for the tests which should contribute towards final results. Easily said than done - but perhaps this is the only way to ensure that students study regularly and not at the end of two years. Needless to say a human brain can retain more by the regulars inputs as against 'biennial bombardments'. I know of many students having nervous breakdown when faced with such extensive course. "By the time I reach the hundredth page I realise I don't know a word on the first page," lamented a young student. Besides acquiring knowledge there has to be emphasis on importance of education and personality build up and let me remind ourselves of what Sir W Muirs said to the students in his address to Aligarh students in 1875:

"Knowledge is not the sole or highest object of your education here. Let the eleves of the Allygarh College be known not only for their learning, but also for their probity and faithfulness; for truth, obedience to their parents, and discharge of all their relative duties of life; for purity and self-restraint; for sympathy and consideration for the wants of others."

THE WORLD AROUND US

[illegible]

STONE FOREST

"The stone forest is an immortal monument that Nature erected for itself, and the holy Olympia mountain that the artist Time created for his disciples of fine arts," announces Tang Shijie proudly. Inhabited by Sani tribe Stone Forest is immortalized in Guishan mountains. This is in Yunnan province of China located in its south east part. The forest is located 89 kilometers from the capital of Yunnan province called Kunming- the new boom city of China. A three lane motor way makes the journey easier as it pierces the mountains in the form of tunnel and forms extensive bridges between mountains. GZ40 as it is called thus allows the vehicles to maintain a speed above hundred kilometers per hour even as it snails among the mountains. The road is only four years old, it is nicely made - smooth and well marked with side shoulders on both sides and has western curse- toll booths at all entry and exit points. This motor way can be compared to any other motor way anywhere else in the world. The scenery on the way was lush green with sprawling fields on both sides. Most of the roads in the city have multi-coloured flowers tastefully planted among grass on either sides. Many roads in the country side boasted of trees on both sides offering shade to the travelers.

The Stone Forest is located in Shilin Yi autonomous county. It occupies 350 square kilometers. It is a geologic wonder consisting of Karst formations that are the highest single body lime stone structure any where in the world. This area has been

classified as a national-level scenic area. Within the area numerous stone peaks showing dissimilar shapes compete with one another for splendor and this area has been praised by some as the 'First Wonder Under the Heaven'.

A huge car park received us as we landed at the entry point like any big entertainment park. As we made our way in, we were greeted by small shops and eager shopkeepers who were shouting and trying to attract our attention with gestures. Body language has no barriers, when tongue does not produce tangible words. The sight of people selling corns – boiled and skewed was nostalgic. As we were hungry, we bought some for a paltry sum of 2 rmb or yuhans equivalent to our sixteen rupees. Their pots were clean and they were using gas cylinders to skew the corns. The sellers were sitting in a very organized fashion. Next, there were numerous small stalls selling fresh fruit, which were quite attractive and reasonably priced. There were many more small stalls of local gifts of the area like bags, costumes, stones, flutes and everyone bought some thing.

After paying the entry fee, we had the choice of either walking around or use their buses. Though we opted for the latter, as the luck would have it we could not get one. There were score of girls clad in traditional Sani tribe's costumes serving as tourist guide waiting for the guests. These girls looked like dolls with their lips adorned with an eternal smile. A wide bridge joins the rest of the world with the stone forest with sprawling lake on both sides and monuments of stones sticking their neck out of the lake.

As we entered the forest there was a large board giving information of different areas. Sunny, our guide, first lead us to the major forest. She was telling us that 300 millions years ago they were submerged in vast expanses of water. Approximately 30 million years ago water receded from this area and the crust got reshaped. Thereafter limestone rocks outcropped from bottom of ocean and underwent a long process of erosion and weathering. Finally thousands of stone pillars, peaks and stalagmites formed in diversified ways. Over many centuries this area inhabited once by thick forest was converted to a land of lakes and stones of different shapes and heights. Lately beautiful plantation has been added to it to draw a contrast and enhance its beauty. The phenomenon has been similar to Grand

Canyon but in a different way. The great sculptor – time with the help of water has carved many masterpieces to be appreciated by art lovers. As these limestone formation vividly resemble a vast forest the area got its name as 'stone forest'.

The first to appear was 'stone screen' where many stones of flat surface appear to form a screen. Many people were getting themselves photographed by changing into the costumes available over there. There were many people there and the place seemed very busy. There were tourists from all over the world in many groups, all filled with excitement of exploring the creations of time. The path leads on to a large platform where local people are cajoling the tourists in buying local produce, books or dolls. They would approach with a smile and just saying, "hello, hello!". Most of them were equipped with calculators for the price negotiation. Starting from 400 yuhans they will be happy to settle the deal at forty or fifty. Nobody knows who wins and who loses! Their persistence more often than not does not let anyone leave stone forest empty handed.

In the stone forest one felt like being in a wonder land. All around there were sky piercing peaks. With each step forward one encountered newer views provoking imagination. Many of the images surprisingly resembled animals, plants, humans or legendary figures rendering the place more mysterious. Following a small path we landed in an area called lake of swords. There were many stones piercing the sky looking like swords. There was a stone at seven feet height and all the tourists were trying to jump and touch it. Many daring men would jump zealously and their group mates would whistle and clap on their success. Following a winding way going up and down one came across a small lake surrounded by stones. There was a wide gap in a stone which looked like an impression of a large foot. On the opposite side was a big gap in a stone looking like hand. The story goes that an immortal was caged here and he tried to push the stones with his hand and foot hence producing these holes! Close by the stone, there was a coral reef supposed to be a million years old.

A winding path led to rock and on climbing it offered the view of sky through a hole and earth through another hole looking down. Coming down and traversing the narrowest part of the forest there was a spot which tested the beauty of a lady.

Here elegant ladies with long thin necks could cross it with their heads up and gentle rotation of neck as against us who would rather duck it and cross it. Our guide could cross it easily! On the front one could see an image as if two birds were kissing each other. On the left side was a stone resembling elephant. We spotted a stone looking like rhinoceros. There was another stone looking like a camel riding on an elephant. One had to let ones fantasy run a little wild and one could see various images. The place was mesmerizing! It was more like seeing various figures in roving clouds.

After climbing up and down mercifully appeared a spot called 'better to stay here for a while'- it could not have been more appropriately named. This led on to one of the most beautiful spots called lotus park having many stones looking like lotus flowers. A corner offered a view of a stone looking like a peak of wild geese, another resembling 'phoenix preening her wings', another 'a woman waiting for her husband'. Then there were stones resembling 'a mother and son going for a walk', 'a leisurely stroller' and 'seven old men'. The excitement built up further as one approached the most cherished sculpture of Aishma. There is a romantic story like a folk lore of love and jealousy. The legend of Aishma added the hues of romance and mysticism to the lovely canvas of beauty. People posed in front of Aishma which looked like two large figures one of the lady on the left side carrying a basket of flowers and presenting to another figure on right side. Light trickle of rain enhanced the beauty of this place. Reflection of Aishma in the lake at the foot of the sculpture multiplied its effect. People came and kept on watching it and most of them got mesmerized by the awe and beauty of Aishma. While leaving, almost everyone turned back to give a final glance and bid good bye to her.

As the time was running short, we had to make our way back. Intoxicated with the beauty of the place and the wish to see more image around it like lion and lioness, ten thousand years old Lingzhi, and 'happy reunion of seven immortals' one felt like staying there for the whole day. The guide told us about other famous images which one could see on an electric bus like 'coming home at dusk', 'legendry horse galloping in the sky', 'godess of love emerging from water' and 'torch'. Her description of sculptures like 'eagle stone', 'dragons dancing'

and 'leaping tigers' and 'lion roaring in the sky' made us promise ourselves to visit the place again for a whole day. We missed some important land marks like 'monk piggy looking for his master', 'defense walls', 'Su Wu herding the sheep', and 'mother teaching her son'. Stone forest is a vast place and has beautiful , under ground attractions to offer like Zhiyun cave and Baiyun cave and some waterfalls the most well recommended being Flying dragon waterfalls. It also offer a rich culture heritage and has regular dances more famous being torch dance, golden dragons, lion dance, trident dance and Tiayoue dance. Regular festivals take place at different times of year which form a main attraction for the visitors from all over the world. These festivals besides dances include wrestling and bullfights.

We left the place with a heavy heart but enjoyed the time spent in the wonder and fantasy land of Aishma. Up to now most of the existing sculptural masterpieces have been created by humans like the great wall, pyramids, the Dunhuang grottoes, TajMahal. But stone Forest is much more meaningful and glorious than man made artificial architectural masterpieces. The great sculptor, the times has never ceased to work in his creative endeavors. He continuously seems to be perfecting his work. That's why the stone forest is always full of surprises and always willing to offer new dimensions to the visitor every time that one visits.

An Easy Stroll in Paris

It has almost become a ritual. Every year on a Friday I take an underground 'metro' line 1 from the congress station at Port Mailto change to metro 7 on Louvre museum and head to Place Monga station. Follow the crowd of different nationalities to the 'Mosque' and offer prayers in one of the most beautiful, well established and oldest mosques in Europe. The experience in itself is inspiring and spiritually elevating. This is distinctly different from offering prayers in UK or anywhere else in the world. The French have to be different and are famous for doing everything 'in a style'. The mosque has a different architecture and the 'ambience' is characteristically different.

After the prayers I tread along 'Rue de Monga' and head to the 'Greek quarters' close to the world famous church of Notredam – perhaps more famous for the hunch back of Notredam. 'Greek quarters' is famous for its eateries. There are innumerable restaurants offering different flavors in different styles. We had the opportunity to have Greek food over here, which was very nice, and later on another occasion very nicely made Salmon. This time I wanted to have a 'take away', fulfill an old dream of sitting on the bank of river Seine, and enjoy the milieu and the food. It was quite hot under the sun so every one was looking for a cover. Nicely pruned Maple trees are the hallmark of Paris. All the roads and footpaths offer a pleasant cover in the shadow of Maple trees planted in straight line as if filed like a column of soldiers.

As I occupied a comfortable spot under the shade and started ravishing my 'take away' it seemed very tasty perhaps more because of the effect of the best sauce – good appetite! Both sides of the river boast of large footpaths. The footpaths are nearly twenty feet below the road and there are steps available near the bridges which adorn the beauty of Paris. People make themselves comfortable on both sides some enjoying the shade and cool breeze and other enjoying the sun shine and hoping to get tanned. Most of the people were in the form of groups - mostly young out to have fun and enjoyment. Couples seemed to enjoy each other's company and lost in the mesmerizing milieu of Paris. Not infrequently people were going around as a family with a middle aged father, youngish looking mother and young children. And then there were some sitting alone and enjoying the company of nature. A young man was playing flute and another was busy in jugglery. A young lady was jogging and an old lady was lost in reading a book. Some people were completely lost in the nature and busy painting. The serene and tranquil ambience would some time be broken by people shouting from the boats carrying passengers through the heart of Paris. Small school going children from all over Europe seem to have the best time of their lives and were enjoying themselves.

After finishing the lunch, I kept on walking along the bank till it came to an end. I climbed the stairs and started walking on the footpath along the road. All along the road there were small book shops on the side of the river. People had put up wooden boxes along the entire length of footpath which were two to three feet in height. The shopkeepers sat on a chair besides the shops and most of them were busy reading books. They all seemed highly literary and did not bother the people walking on the footpaths. Most of the people walking on the road looked up for their favourite books in this vast collection spread over miles. Most of these books were in French and some of these books seemed to be 'antique' but all very well preserved. There was a nice old bookshop in the Greek quarters by the name of 'Shakespeare company'. It exclusively contained English old and new books on various topics. . Books have an important and integral role in their lives, people read while traveling on metros, sitting on the sides of the roads, and lying in the parks. There was a homeless person lying on the side of a shop with

ungroomed hair and beard, even he was fully absorbed in a book. This shows the love these people have for books. Civilized nations have the traits that differentiate them from the rest!

After crossing the bridge I entered the 'Jardines' – the gardens between the Louvre museum and 'Concorde'. Though this is a lot smaller than its competitors like Hyde Park of London yet the ambience is same. There are large fountains of very simple design and people sit around it on chairs. Here people seem to be busy in different activities. Some people make themselves comfortable under the shade reading books and other ravish the sunshine with eyes closed. The best thing about Paris and for that matter all Western countries is that people are lost in themselves and do not care what others are doing. Unfortunately, back home we are always more interested in others' affairs and spend more time in finding out what others are doing than minding our own business.

Jogging is a favourite pastime as many people were enjoying themselves running around. This reminded me of Boston where the whole town seemed to be in the habit of jogging. This reflects the importance people attach to healthy habits and staying healthy. People regardless of age and sex were jogging around the park. Their enthusiasm, persistence and determination is worth all the appreciation. Even on Champs Elysees people are busy jogging up and down the road.

The French seem to be very polite and humble people and would go to any extent to help the tourists in their 'broken' English. They seem to take pride in their nation and language. Our guest of honour in the congress- a minister of health addressed the audience in French. The younger generation have good working knowledge of English. Many French want to visit England, only to brush up their English.

What could be the ultimate pleasure of life? An easy stroll and a cup of tea on Champs Elysees. A few days that I spent in Paris, an evening walk on Champs Elysees was a 'not to be missed' item. The footpaths are perhaps wider than the road in itself. The shops and malls are quite deep. It seems that when the road was being planned, it was planned for the next century. The road throbs with people of different ages, and nationalities. There are many Arabs who have probably settled here for decades. Many

of the Arab ladies walk around with their scarves and traditional clothes. Among the French they walk with their heads up with pride clinging to their traditions and religious norms. The evenings on Champs Elysees carry an aroma which is unique to Paris. The shops are open till late. 'Sephora' is perhaps the biggest perfume shop, which contains all types of perfumes. The place is inundated with people and is perhaps the busiest shop on the street. There are many malls containing beautiful small shops. There will be hardly any thing that will not be available on this road. Maple trees adorn the beauty of the road and offer some respite from the sun when it shines with full vigour. There are many car and motor bike show rooms showing off the mouth watering newest models of cars and bikes. The road at the end has beautiful shops of Cartier and Mont Blanc but perhaps the rights of entry are reserved.

My walk had to be interrupted for a nice 'Earl Grey' cup of tea in one of the small restaurants on the sides with extension on the footpath. Even the extensions on the footpath are very nicely done in an organized way, which does not hamper the free flow of traffic of humans and enhances the beauty of the spot. The road is clean – no littering, people walk gently and cross the road at the proper Zebra crossing guided by the red light. The life moves in an ordinate and disciplined way on the road and by and large in Paris.

After crossing 'Arch De Triumphe' there is down hill road leading to our congress centre and our hotel. After such a long walk my feet started protesting and an hour before the flight I had to nurture my ailing feet in warm water. My mind was full of memories of Paris - the love they have for books, cleanliness, discipline and human dignity is almost infectious. How can we imbibe their good traits and progress to claim a special place for ourselves in this competitive world?

A BIG STEP FORWARD

There was no concept of air conditioned taxies in 1992. Now, many 'Kalipeeli' taxies - as they call it, boast of being air conditioned. They are transformed versions of the old Fiat models. These cars are nearly a couple of decades old and have undergone major 'facelift' and engine replacements. Many of them have installed old second hand boxes of air conditioning units, which have single vents with little controls as such. The old engines thunder under the extra load of these air conditioners but function well on the high tide of the engine as a consequence of excessive 'raise'. All the facelift, belated air conditioning and rebirth of engine are the fruits of local technology. And this local technology is working wonder over there in Mumbai!

We hired a so called air conditioned bus with individualized lights and reclining seats. Well it had all these things but the 'local version' of it. It was an ordinary bus that we have in our country but had undergone some major transformations. A partition of ordinary glass was erected in a 'most unprofessional' way just behind the driver's seat to have two compartments, in front for the driver and the inevitable conductor who has to guide the driver and perform his small chores and in the back - the portion for the passengers. The seat for the driver was most uncomfortable with very primitive looking dials for different gauges. The passenger seats were fixed in one position, some were reclined and some were fixed at ninety degrees. The lever

was not working in most of the seats. These seats seemed to be second hand seats taken from written off or accidented cars. The air conditioning was same as in the cars with small second hand boxes fixed up in the front and then vented individually to all the seats. The air was cool but the controls of vents never worked. The so called individualized lights were ordinary lights with no chance of offering any help with reading! From outside it looked like an ordinary bus and from inside it was a very poor imitation of what a proper bus should be!

The launch that took us from the dockyard to the Elephanta islands was a master piece of local technology. It had two floors and had tyres fitted on all sides to reduce the effects of jolts while parking. Ordinary plastic seats were fixed to the floor on not a very professional way! There were no safety arrangements and no concept of life jackets. The two floors were connected by an ordinary wooden ladder and anyone climbing up had to pay extra and bump his head against the roof. On the upper floor was the 'captain deck' which was 'open air' with a little canopy housing a stool and a primitive looking wheel. There were no alarms or dials and all they had was a very old rather ancient looking horn with plastic ball attached to it but it worked.

Shitabi express took us from Delhi to Agra. The train seemed to be pretty old from outside but inside it was clean with two rows of seats on both sides of the aisle. The seats were a little stiff and fixed and to put it mildly not 'very comfortable'. They had levers to recline but refused to obey the commands. There was space for the luggage on the top on both sides. They were supposed to look like the 'Euro trains' but was a local imitation with no matching comfort.

Most of rickshaws, taxis and buses now run on CNG gas in Mumbai. Under a well conceived plan these vehicles were encouraged and helped to change over to CNG, with a threat that any vehicle with unacceptable levels of smoke emission will be banned from road. And this has worked very well for the city as the pollution level has gone down dramatically. No longer do you see 'ugly smoke emitting' vehicles on the road. The vehicles may be old and ugly but the smoke they emit is not black and poisonous for the inhabitants of the city.

There are very obvious and basic lessons to learn here. First, there seem to be a policy that is being followed in that part of the world. We seem to be riding in a rudderless ship and do not have any concept of any direction. Second, there is definite progress taking place - may be at slow pace but it is obvious and persistent. Thirdly, there is general awareness about pollution and they are determined to fight it even with very limited resources. They have got their priorities right and they know which path to follow. Lastly, they are trying to find indigenous answers to the problems they are facing and they take great pride in this. This is the only way in which the local industry can develop. Slowly and gradually one can raise the standards and improve the quality by enforcing strict discipline.

ELEPHANTA CAVES OF MUMBAI

The trip to 'Elephant's caves' was nearly called off! As the bus stopped at the dockyard, a disgusting stench welcomed us. The first member of our entourage almost reflexly withdrew to the bus to take refuge in the air-conditioned milieu. After a few minutes of self-training and motivation we ventured out and headed towards the launch that was supposed to take us to the island. This was like a regular 'transport system' to carry the passengers to various islands. This particular one was for the island of 'Elephanta caves'. The launch was a proud product of local technology. It was a medium sized vehicle with the capacity of fifty passengers and it left as soon as it was filled. There was nothing spectacular about the launch but it had all the 'minimum' necessities, including a blow horn that used to be fitted in trucks some fifty years ago! It had two stories with engine fitted in the basement. It was fitted with benches and ordinary plastic chairs fixed to the floor. Old tyres were utilised on the sides to make the bumps bearable. It took us nearly an hour to reach our destination but the journey was interesting and the Arabian sea was 'serene'. On the way many of the 'adventurer ones ' tried their hand on the Captains wheels and tested their skills with the digital cameras.

The Elephanta island was named by the Portuguese, after the statue of an elephant near the landing area of the island. The island of Elephanta, being a commercial, military and religions centre for centuries has traces of early Buddhist culture It has

been declared as an UNESCO World Heritage site. The Elephanta Island is the site of the magnificent Elephanta caves, containing beautiful carvings, sculptures, and a temple dedicated to the Hindu deities Shiva.

As we landed at the islands we had a mini rail waiting for us and an eight minutes ride took us to the entry point to the caves. Like a typical tourist resort the entry was by tickets. An easy stroll took us to the shopping mall and there were many small shops on both sides. Corns prepared on the coals have always been my favourite and I enjoyed warm and soft corn over there. There started a steep and long climb to the caves up the hill. Chairs were available with four persons to carry up the hill. There were more than 120 stairs which could make anyone breathless. Most of us started climbing considering this to be a stress test. The journey was broken at various points under the disguise of buying the local wooden products. There were innumerable small stalls with neatly and orderly organised souvenirs lined up to woo the potential buyers. After climbing the daunting stairs we had to purchase yet another ticket to get into actual caves. The ticket for the foreigners including us was ten times of that fixed for the locals. This discrimination was rather unpleasant.

The 'elaphanta caves' have a long history and thought to date back to the Silhara kings belonging to the period between 9th - 12th centuries. With the Brahminical resurgence during the reign of Gupta dynasty in 3rd century AD, these great caves exploded into existence at Elephanta. The island was the capital of the powerful coastal kingdom but later the Portuguese took possession of the island and as they first found a monolith elephant the island was named Elephanta. As the worship of the figure of the Buddha began to be encouraged with rise of the Mahayana sect of Buddhism, a shrine was introduced to house Buddha's image, replacing the cells at the centre of the back wall.

We had to our self a very learned and knowledgeable guide who enlightened us about the culture complex and unveiled to us many ramifications of the sculptures which we would have not learnt otherwise. 'Elephanta caves' are rock cut temples created by carving out rock, and creating the columns, the internal spaces and the images. The entire temple is akin to a huge sculpture, through whose corridors and chambers one can

walk. The entire complex was created through a process of rock removal. Some of the rock surfaces are highly finished while some are untreated bare rock. The entire cave temple complex covers an area of about 60,000 square feet and it consists a main chamber and two lateral ones, courtyards and several subsidary shrines. There are three entrances to this temple. The ones on the east and the west marking the axis of the temple. The pillars consist of fluted columns standing on square bases, and are crowned with fluted cushion capitals.

I had this nostalgic feeling of being in Italian museums where guides unravel the mysteries of painting in a most entertaining way. According to the current guide, in Hindu Mythology three deities govern their world: Brahma – the creator, Vishnu – the Preserver and Maheshwara – the Destroyer. The enigmatic image of Trimurthi Sadasiva is perhaps the most attractive sculpture and considered to be among the most perfect expressions of Indian art of their time. This most well-known figure is 20 feet high Trimurti, depicting Siva in the three roles of creator, preserver and destroyer. This sculpture is supposed to be one of the centerpieces of the Indian sculptural tradition. This attracts immediate attention upon entering the temple through the northern entrance. The huge, high-relief works in the main cave, on both sides of the three entrances and on the south wall, are characteristic of the cult of Siva. Also on the southern wall are grand sculptured images of Kalyanasundara, Gangadhara, Ardhanariswara and Uma Maheswara. To the west of the northern entrance are sculptured images of Nataraja and Andhakaasuravadamoorthy, and to its east are images of Yogiswara and Ravanaanugrahamurthy.

There are sculptures showing Shiva practising Yoga, meditating with snakes coiled around his neck, and at places he is in company of his wife, Parvati. A panel of the caves represents the wedding of Shiva with Parvati with the rites being performed by Brahma and scores of other deities attending the grand ceremony.

To the east of the main temple is a courtyard, flanked by the secondary shrine. This temple contains six pillars at its entrance, four of which are free standing and two engaged. The entrance leads to a hall decorated with sculptured panels depicting legends from the Shiva Purana.

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To the east of the main temple is a courtyard, flanked by the secondary shrine. This temple contains six pillars at its entrance, four of which are free standing and two engaged. The entrance leads to a hall decorated with sculptured panels depicting legends from the Shiva Purana.

Undoubtedly the caves were the creation of a genius, a master architect, who having thoroughly absorbed and assimilated the magnificent contribution of his predecessors in the dual traditions of the independent free standing sculpture and rock-cut architecture, produced a monument introducing a whole new world of form quite distinct from any previous achievement. It is believed that the caves were used as target practice after Portuguese constructed a fort and put a flag to ward off pirates. However, many of the sculptures have been desecrated. The British captured the island from the Portuguese. The British planned to take the monolith elephant to England but they could not lift it. It is now kept in the Bombay Museum. Made out of solid rock, the caves attract more visitors each year than the entire city of Mumbai. No wonder, this place resonates with the spiritual energy of India. Unfortunately, rude Portuguese rulers who took potshots at Hindu deities with their rifles have damaged many of the sculptures inside. And yet somehow, nothing has disturbed the sublime beauty of this place for centuries.

The island abounds in monkeys which add to the mystery of the place. There are innumerable friendly monkeys of various sizes which have a keen eye on the visitor's food. They do not hesitate a bit to be the uninvited guest and share the food. Some of them feel it is their right to purloin the visitors of their food.

The journey on the way back means climbing down the stairs and finding a good buy from the local vendors. The mini train took us back to the launch to take us back to the dockyard. The hour journey was spent in discussing Elephanta caves and her monkeys. Our group leader had planned everything in details and every thing worked according to his plan. As we entered a vegetarian restaurant for the belated lunch the ladies with us had only one request - to rush through the lunch as they had to catch on their shopping!

LA RAMBLAS

Life literally throbs on the street of La Ramblas. The place pulsates with 'activity' and there is some thing going all the time! One can spend hours watching and also being a part of 'the show'. The road is designed to be an open air theatre- with two thirds of the road in the centre being reserved for pedestrians. There are single lane roads on both sides and then there are footpaths on either side. Cars seem to be 'intruders' on this other wise paradise for pedestrians.

It connects Placa Capitulana to Miarador de Columbus. It starts from a large round-about which houses large shopping malls, the largest being one of the biggest in Europe. The round about in itself is full of historic monuments. It is tastefully decorated with fountains, and statues amidst nicely manicured plants and lawns. The place is full of people- crossing roads, shopping, catching buses, waiting for others and then those who are watching all of them.

La Ramblas used to be an outlet for the torrential rains and water could find way into the sea. With the passage of time it has the attained the unique distinction of being one of the landmarks of Barcelona. It has become one of the 'most important places' to visit and enjoy. If Barcelona boasts of being the most cosmopolitan city in Spain, La Ramblas can truly claim the credit of being the epitome of this. One comes across people from all the corners of the world. But perhaps the best part is that every one is out there to enjoy and make merry but busy in

themselves. The mood on the street is festive and one has the feeling that there is a live show which is being staged everyday!

La Ramblas can be divided into three parts; the first part has the long history of small shops selling small animals and birds on both sides. The loud chirping of African parrots, interspersed by cocks crow and little birds tweeting add a distinguished colour with special auditory effects. Small animals being sold over here are rabbits, small turtles, crocodiles, lizards and mangroves. Beautiful hand-made cages are on sale which bear testimony to the local craft. These are small open air shops which are packed up at night. The place is kept very clean and has no foul odour. Small animals and multifarious birds bring this part close to nature and one feels as one is in a park.

Second part of the street abounds in flower and plant shops. Beautiful arrangements of multi-coloured flowers are displayed on both sides of the central walk way. Red, pink, green and yellow flowers, small and large in sizes, rich in colour and loud in appeal paint different colours on the canvass. It takes one to a garden with flowers dancing to cool breeze. There are many green plants displayed in small pots. All pots host fresh plants like different Cacti, palms and Aloe vera. People throng these shops and Spanish seem to be generally very fond of flowers and plants. Again, all the plants are displayed meticulously and tastefully.

The third part of La Ramblas has small open air restaurants on both sides. In spite of chairs and tables placed on both sides, the street has enough space for the visitors to walk. This is a nice place to take rest, have a drink, watch people and be watched by other people. They have nicely laid down chairs and tables and serve hot meals on order. They offer cold and hot drinks to thirsty and tired tourists. The distinguishing mark of this portion are the artists who draw caricatures and amazing portraits. There are other artists who draw different scenes in loud colours and sell it on demand. An artist would charge 40 -50 euros for a portrait and 20 for a cartoon. This reminded me of similar artists in Rome in squares and Paris on the banks of the river.

A little distance from Metro station of Liecue is the famous Theatre of Lieceu. It has been rebuilt after a fire and is now recognized as a land mark of Barcelona. It has the honour of

hosting some of the best shows in the world and has been visited by world class singers. The place is full of history and is visited by many tourists.

La Ramlas is a theatre and many people make their livelihood by acting. The common and 'in thing' is to paint the body and either stand still or act. Our first encounter was with a gentleman with beard, painted black and wearing a hat. He was riding a stationary bike with another person moving on his side- this person was a skeleton. The gentleman would put his head down if someone approached him for a photograph, but after presentation of 'Euros', he was most obliging and smiling. A lady had painted herself black with large wings attached to her back and holding on to a rod. She would smile and even bless with a sweet if approached after a proper present. A short stature gentleman portrayed himself as Charlie Chaplin holding on to a stick. A young lady had painted herself white and portrayed like a fairy. The attraction for many of the tourists was a person sitting on a commode and reading a book. His actions were hilarious and had many people laughing around him. Then there were some puppeteers, all experts in their field. One was making a skeleton dance and sing on the famous song of Micheal Jackson. Another was playing with dolls and making them dance on Spanish songs. People would throng around them for some time and then pay them whatever they wanted to!

Many amateur groups play music on the sides and collect money. A group of young men turned out to be experts in acrobatics. They enthralled the audience with wonderful demonstration of their skills. They took somersaults and swiveled around on the tunes of songs. People were generous in applause and the show continued for half an hour. In the middle of street two strong men were showing their muscles and strength by acrobats. Another group was playing live music and dancing. Every one is out there to enjoy and ravel the best moments of life.

After 'enjoying' fish for a few days the desire for having local food took us to a local restaurant by the name of 'Rajah'. This was being operated by Pakistanis and they turned out to be very obliging and hospitable. That restaurant became our regular stop to have a strong cup of tea. We enjoyed having Daal and vegetables cooked in a delicious way. We were informed that

there was a large community of nearly fifty thousand of Pakistanis in Barcelona. Most of the shops in that area were owned by them. Most of the waiters in the restaurants were from the same origin. We came across many of our Pakistanis selling cold drinks and flowers on the street. Many of them greeted us by offering 'Assalam O Alaikum' as we had Prof Samad - a trademark of Islam and Pakistan clad in Shairwani and 'Karakol' cap.

Alittle down the lane is 'Mirador Clumbus' in the memory of discovery of America. His statue adorns a tall column with his fingers pointing towards America. This is very close to the sea shore. A short walk on a wooden bridge takes one to an adjoining large area called Marus magnus. This boasts of a large shopping mall with a large restaurant which offers excellent sea food in a style. There are many benches on the side overlooking the sea. The wooden bridge graciously swivels in the centre to facilitate the passage of ships and large boats across. This continues across to a large sandy beach which is famous all over the world.

This adjoining area served for residence of sportsmen who participated in 1992 Olympics. The Olympics gave a new look to this otherwise a low trodden city. The roads were redone, new hotels were built, parks were planned and railway station was renovated. Barcelona people agree that this is the best thing that happened to their city. New buildings were erected and Olympic facilities were created just south of Espana square in Muijic gardens.

The mood on the street is inspirational as people giggle and chuckle on the road. The spirit is infectious as every one has plenty of time to watch the actors and shows and more importantly be happy. Spanish seem to be happy go lucky people who are willing to extend their arms to welcome guests from all over the world. Words are not important when people exhibit their love by affectionate gestures!

IN THE HOLY HAND

THE EPITOME

Lips barely moving, eyes lowered down, tears rolling down the cheek, neck bent down with ultimate respect, upper torso bent a little forward, breathing gently, standing absolutely still, arms held on sides neither folded nor lying freely – this is depiction of absolute respect and humility. There is no concept of whispering or talking over here. And why not, undoubtedly this is the most blessed of the blessed places in the world! Presenting 'Salaam' to the 'most noblest' of all, is an ordeal which stirs the soul to ecstasy and still forbids to let that reveal in any way. Standing in front of 'the biggest blessing for the human kind' is a spiritual experience which words lack the potency to describe. Standing over here, one is unsure of whether to thank Allah Subhanu Taala for His unlimited kindness to be blessed with the honour of presenting Salaam or lament on the committed sins which forfeit one of any right to be there.

The day a Muslim is borne and Azzan echoes in his ears, his soul becomes restless and he starts looking forward to the day when he will have the biggest blessing of his life to visit Madinah Shareef. The mere mention of Makkah and Madinah evokes an intense emotional response in a Muslim soul. Even planning to visit the Harmain Shareefain produces goose pimples. When the plan to visit the holy land finalises, it in itself is considered as a sign of a 'special invitation' from Allah Subhanu Taalah and his beloved Prophet (PBUH). The

congratulatory messages from kith and kin make one feel 'very special' and enhances the importance of the spiritual journey per-se.

Boarding the plane to Saudia evokes mixed feelings. Extreme happiness and joy mixed with guilt of not being able to do enough. Sometimes the happiness rules and at other time the feeling of not being 'good enough' and having 'nothing' to present to Him takes over. On the way, all the time one cogitates as to how to present Salaam to Him (PBUH).One thinks of 'Naats and Salaams' and try to discover the depths of meaning hidden in them.

Arrival in Madinah is a hair raising experience and this opens flood gates of history in the mind. One is reminded of early history and feels like tracing the roots and birth of Islam. The eyes tirelessly search for the most revered green dome in the universe. Tall, proud and geometrically simple pillars help to localize the Masjad e Nabvi. The awe and beauty of Masjad enhance the grandeur of the place. The Masjad in itself is like a 'miracle', and the enormity is over whelming. Though it satisfies all the recent scientific criteria of architecture but its magnificence is all due to the 'barkaat' of Holy prophet (PBUH). The mosque now occupies area more than what used to be whole of Madinah at one time.

Offering 'Salaam' is the epic activity in Masjad Nabvi. Though there is perennial rush over there, but it peaks around prayer times. After every prayer people queue up to express their veneration and present their love for the Holy Prophet (PBUH). During Ramazan the mosque is filled to the brim and thousands of people line up to pray outside and on the roof. Though every one aspires to offer the flowers of love and respect to the most beloved prophet (PBUH) only a small percentage of devotees have the good fortune to do so. Special arrangements are made on Fridays and other important days. Besides local guards on duty, special force is called in to stream line the pilgrims. The front portion is cordoned off from the rest of the mosque. Special efforts are made to ensure that people who have gathered to pray should not advance straight towards the front lines. People have to exit from right sided gates and then enter from right sided gate at the front called 'Babe Salam' – the door of peace.

On special days, the line is formed at gate and crawls its way to Bab e Salaam.

Respiration and heart rate become faster on entering the Babe Salam. The emotions start building up with every step. The feeling is unique as one prepares for an 'audience' with the 'greatest' human being that ever blessed our ephemeral world. Legs become heavy and shaky as one approaches the four walls what once used to be the house of Hazrat Aisha. Here the devotees bifurcate into two columns, one who walk straight and while paying homage exit through Babe Gibrael. The other column leads to front rows where people are allowed to stay around for some time and open their hearts out. Extreme respect and love dominate the ambience. The mannerism reflect intense adoration and humility as if one is shy of one's existence. Many people prefer to stand behind pillar or others and look at the grill with profound veneration and affection.

'Do not raise your voice in front of the holy prophet PBUH' enunciates the holy Quran. Extreme respect is exhibited in front of Roza Shareef. One does not want to look up due to respect but then to reassure one self that one is actually standing in front of the Roza, the eyes inadvertently elevate and hug the most venerable 'golden' grill. Standing in front of Roza Mubarak, the sentiments alter as one feels soaked with reverence and love. One is awe struck and is intimidated with the somber and respectful ambience. Questions like what to present and where to start from electrify brain and the human faculties have no answer. As one pause before the golden grill the mind gets blank and all the preponderant plans vanish in air. Here is the time when eyes take over, the uninhibited and endless chain of tears render tongue silent and become the spokesman of the body and soul. Tears, unlike words, do not need to be categorized and classified. Tears are nothing but brine but when air has difficulty in expression, liquid say it all. Hundreds of eloquent words meticulously tied in a cord may not be able to communicate, what an innocent tear can reveal without the props of words. There are tears which spring due to extreme joy of being in Madinah, and then being in Masjad Nabvi and above all being blessed with the ultimate joy of being able to pray in front of Roza Mubarik. Many tears are shed, on self realization and audit of 'accomplishment' of the life time. Some tears find their

way as one begs for forgiveness and mercy. Many tears flow without any reason, perhaps just to become 'immortal' by shedding in this holy ambience. Tears come to one's rescue and as the Roza mubarik fades behind the mist of tears, new windows of communication open. After shedding some tears, one feels a bit composed and starts finding feet on the ground.

This time round, the 'dialogue' is easy to start! One starts with 'Salaam' in Arabic and then some where on the line 'derails' to one's own mother tongue. Mind flashes with all the people who asked for presentation of 'Salaam'. Suddenly one hears people reciting 'Naats' in a very low voice and tone. One's mind starts recollecting all the Naats while searching one's memory. The tongue starts reciting these Naats and Salaams, and heart joins in for the rhythm and joy. Undoubtedly, like tears these naats come to one's rescue, as prose cannot convey what poetry does effectively in brevity. One creates a small world of one's own, where one is in direct communication, oblivious of all other external factors. Only Allah Subhanu Taala knows how many 'worlds' are created over there and what are the 'levels' of communication established by different people?

When it comes to say good bye, the heart starts sinking! Offering 'Salaam' to Hazrat Abu Bakar and Hazrat Umar is an experience in its own self. The memory takes one back to the old times of Khilafat of both Khulfai Rashedeen. One reminds one self of their supreme sacrifice for the cause of Islam. One recalls their devotion and love for the holy prophet (PBUH). Their unparalleled wisdom and fair judgment is remembered fondly. One exits via Babe Gibrael but the magnetic attraction of the 'green dome' forces every one to look back at every step.

Every one who enters Masjad Nabvi wishes to offer 'salaam' before leaving the precinct. A small percentage has the blessing of being able to present Salaam, but this remains like 'the supreme' aspiration of all Muslims. Leaving Masjad Nabvi is a painful experience but then the hope of being 'invited' again to present Salaam ignites candles of hope and optimism.

THE ULTIMATE

As one completes the 'seven rounds' one has undergone a major journey of self discovery, unraveled many mysteries of life, formed a new bond with fellow human beings and developed a newer relationship with Allah Subhanu Taala. Purified, enriched and elevated after performing Tawaf, the epitome arrives as one heads towards the 'Multazim'. This in itself is an unforgettable journey and a new experience. For once, one has the feeling of being 'very close' to Allah Subhanu Taala. This is undeniably the most precious and sought after place on the face of the earth. Makkah is undoubtedly the 'mother of all cities' and has the unique distinction as the primary abode of Islam. Khana-i-Kaaba is 'the house of Allah' and the most well-respected precinct in the world. In the Haram, next to Hijre Aswad, under the door of the Khana-i-Kaaba 'Multazim' is the most revered spot. Multazim has the unique distinction as all the prayers offered over here gain access to His special attention. People open their hearts out to Him with conviction that all their prayers will be answered.

People overwhelmed by emotions lose control of themselves and many cheeks are wet with tears, some tears are born out of repentance, some flow seeking forgiveness and some are shed out of happiness to be fortunate enough to touch the holy walls of Khana-i-Kaaba. Restless souls find solace under the shade of Khana-i-Kaaba. While praying at Multazim the arms of clock cease to move, and the whole world comes to a standstill. What a

place, where people instead of asking for worldly favours and little gains, prefer praying for substantial things. People instead of praying for worldly gains revolving around 'zar and zameen' ask for higher rewards of lasting value. Here one realises the essence of life and the true value of this ephemeral world.

Here one is oblivious of the surroundings and seem to have a 'direct connection' with Allah Subhanu Taala. "Oh Allah, the Most Magnificent, the Greatest of all, have mercy on us; indeed we are sinful, we do not recognise our responsibilities and have been extremely lazy in performing our obligations, we admit to our shortcomings but then we are humans, please have mercy on us!" the gentleman next to me was crying full throated. He was repeating it again and again. Tears were rolling down his cheeks but he was totally oblivious of it.

"Oh, Ghafoor and Rehman, please save us from the disaster; our nation is heading towards anarchy and we see no light at the end of tunnel! Please save the Ummat-i-Muhammadia from internal strife and disunity; our nation is being labelled with different derogatives; we ought to be the leaders of humanity, please give us the vision, determination and persistence to work for it," a young Caucasian was praying his heart out.

"God, we have been ignorant of our most important duty of spreading Your religion to all the corners of the world. We realise many of our brethren will succumb to icy hands of death without embracing Islam. We also appreciate that many of our Muslim brothers are not practising Muslims and we should have put in more effort to infuse the true spirit of Islam in them. We accept our deficiencies, we are but human, and we are not perfect! But we very humbly submit to You that do not judge us by our actions but look at our intentions. Please open the doors of mercy on our nation and give us the determination and strength to spread Your message all over the world," a bearded person holding on to the 'Multazim' was wailing and imploring in a most beseeching tone.

"Oh Lord, save us from the fire of hell, save our brothers and sisters and parents from hell, kindly grant us a place in Jannatul Firdaus. Our actions may not be good enough but we belong to the ummat of Your beloved, please be extra kind to us and forgive us," a young man in his early twenties was wailing. He

kept on crying and repeating as if he wanted a reassurance from Allah Subhanu Taala there and then.

My cheeks were wet, hands raised for prayers and eyes gazing at the door of Khana-i-Kaaba with love with an ardent desire to embrace it. But the 'gentleman' in me was forbidding me to push the other zaireen and hurt some one. As I was looking at the Khana-i-Kaaba, a rather youngish lady clad in Chadur made her way to the 'Multazim' while pushing me aside. The 'shurtas' tried to stop her. Many people praying in that area looked at her in disgust. Some tried to point to her that it was inappropriate for her to be in this 'male dominated' area. She could not careless, and she did not answer any one. She headed straight for the 'Multazim', and a few seconds later, I saw her clinging to the door. She poured her heart out, looked up, raised her hands to thank Allah and proceeded to Hateem. For a few minutes she was oblivious of where she was, who she was and that she should have kept away from males. She had a clearly marked goal and she went straight for it. This is a special place where some times one has to abandon the rules of sanity and let the emotions rule! I was most impressed by her determination and persistence. No wonder I was clinging to the 'Multazim' and praying loudly a few minutes later.

Since the day we learnt how to pray, an integral part of our prayers has been to visit Harmain Sharefain. Most of our Pesh Imams in the mosques and in religious congregations supplicate with extreme humility, great love and fervour. One of the favourite prayers is to beg Allah Subhanu Taala for the blessing to visit the holy land. For many of our folks the ultimate 'blessing and pleasure' of life would be to visit Makkah-Madinah. Many of our simpletons save money all their lives, in small denominators, to be able to make the pilgrimage. When the draws are drawn for Haj, the fortunate ones are congratulated and those who are not selected are consoled. The smile on the faces of pilgrims for Umra and Haj depicts extreme satisfaction, gratitude and resolute determination to be a better Muslim.

It is not difficult to imagine the emotional upheaval of the pilgrims as they embark on the holy journey. Landing in Saudi Arabia is like realisation of a life long dream. Many of the pilgrims have no control on tears wetting their cheeks as they

enter the Hudood of Haram in Makkah. Entering the Haram and seeing the most beloved and respected first 'house of Allah' is an experience which words cannot describe. It always amuses me to realise that how-so-ever one is 'loaded' with prayers to be presented on the first sight of Khana-i-Kaaba, one is rendered speechless, awe struck and mesmerised by the charisma, magnetism and grandeur of Khana-i-Kaaba. It takes time, which seem like centuries, to digest and realise that the long cherished dream has eventually found the attire of reality. One keeps on looking at the beauty in 'admiration and disbelief' with profound love and tenderness! One has to keep reminding oneself that what is present in the real form in front of the eyes is the 'Haram Shareef'!

Then starts the Umra and the Tawaf, as one wanders through the lanes of memory and the pages of the little books one is carrying, to follow the rituals correctly. But very shortly one gets used to the environment and starts feeling at home. After all, have we not been cherishing the memory of this house since our childhood and offering our prayers facing toward this place? How can one feel a stranger in a place that one visits more than a dozen times every day? The mere realisation that one is a guest of the most hospitable 'Host' not only runs a cold chill in the spine but it also alleviates all worldly anxiety and tension.

Of all the 'Mustajab Dawat' spots in the world, Multazim undeniably is the most distinguished. A few minutes spent over there are better than life long earning. This place offers a unique opportunity for 'catharsis'. In the process one realises that one has been following trivial in life. The prayers offered over here help one to define new aims of life and make new pledges to follow the righteous path. This provides a new opening in life where one can 'redirect' the flow of life. This presents an exceptional option of reinforcing and re-establishing the relationships with Allah Subhanu Taala - the Creator of us all.

Do You Have Change?

I was looking for the change as I needed to pay for taxi and some small things. We booked a taxi to take us to Masjid Aisha and the taxi driver told us point blank that he had no change and wanted exact forty riyals. Usually the hotel receptionists are very helpful and are courteous enough to extend little favours like getting change and ushering a taxi. Not in this hotel, the receptionist – a young local man was quite blunt in his broken English that he did not have any change. We went to an adjoining book shop and were brushed off brusquely. Wearing Ahram, we went to a super market but lady luck did not smile on us. Next, was a grocery shop with a local attendant and we decided to buy a couple of drinks and get the change but no - even that was not possible. By this time we felt really disgusted and frustrated as we were in a rush to get on with Umra. I must confess we had not judged the gravity of situation before hand! Eventually another taxi driver reluctantly agreed to take us and entertain our 'big bill'. Was it that there was no change available or was it that the people are generally not very helpful?

It was our second day in Madinah Shareef and I had exhausted all my petty change. I was in need of some petty cash for minor things. As I got down from the hotel room and went to the reception, the young man at the counter without any second question, took the note and looked for the change in the drawer. As he could not find the appropriate change there, he apologised

and offered two notes from his personal wallet as the change. I entered the first shop in the hotel lobby and asked for some change. The shopkeeper looked at me, gave me a smile and gave me some change for a hundred ryals note. I made my way to the adjoining big shop selling watches, with a tender smile the shop keeper offered me whatever change he had. Now I needed change of the last fifty note. The owner of the adjoining book shop gave me five ryal notes in change with a genuine smile. No one lied to me about not having the change. It was as if 'lying' even at a small scale was not part of their character. I was immensely impressed with their 'training' and basic 'character'. It also became apparent that they considered us as their genuine guests and wanted to look after us. By the time I was entering the Masjid Nabvi I was overwhelmed with their kindness and genuine respect!

The character of a nation is revealed in minor things and that reflects both the basic traits and the education/training. Here the response to asking for change opened a new world to me, offering me insights into their philosophy and priorities of life. Albiet the hospitality of the inhabitants of Madinah forms the basis of the survival of Islam after Hijrat but the way they do it is beyond compare. A decade ago, while visiting the library of Masjid Nabvi, I met a gentleman working in the procurement section. He explained to me in his meticulous English the working of the newly-found Quran Complex and the goals of the new institution. As I was saying good-bye to him he offered me a bottle of 'Ittar'. Though I tried to resist, yet he forced me to accept the present.

In Ramazan, every evening just before the Iftar, a 40-year-old gentleman would go around carrying a big bag of 'Ajwa dates'. He would present seven dates and they had to be accepted in right hand. "Why does he not distribute one or two dates per person so that many more people would get it?" I asked my neighbour. "He is trying to follow the sunnah!" was the brief answer. He would not release his 'tranche' if the person extended his left hand. The same person would bring books of dua and hadith and distribute freely among us. There were many more of them offering different items, to seek the pleasure of Allah Subhanahuwa Taala by following the sunnah.

Just before the prayers many people will apply 'Attar' on the back of hands of their neighbours and many a time to the whole file-'saf' to follow the 'sunnah'. This creates a special ambience with the dominating aroma of 'Aud' or 'Ghilaf Kaaba' attars. While applying attar there is no distinction of white and black, Arab and ajmi and guests and local. Many people queue up on both sides to apply the attar on the hands of the people who have the good fortune of presenting Salaam to Hazrat Muhammad SAW. Their faces radiate with joy as the fervor inspiring this activity is very obvious. These people actually thank the fortunate people who are about to present the salaam for their acceptance and extending their hands. The Haram is filled up long before Jumma prayers. Just before the prayers people will start presenting the attar and this creates a mystic environment.

The hospitality extended during Ramazan is unparalleled and perhaps unique to this place. According to the locals many people will take loans to offer Iftar to guests - guests of Allah Subhanu Taala and His habeeb SAW. They are compulsive 'excellent hosts' and are obsessive about what they offer to their guests! Outside the Haram, children have a competition to invite the Zaireen to their Dastar Khwan for the Iftar. Many trucks roll in with yogurt, bread and dates just before the Iftar. The locals mark their territory in the Masjid nabvi and the adjoining areas and try to feed their guests to the best of their resources. While ensuring the bare minimum being bread, yogurt and a plate full of dates, dates of different varieties, Halwa of many types and cheese is added on the Dastar Khwan at many places.

Saluting their hospitality, kindness and love one understands why inhabitants of Madinah have the most distinguished distinction of being the neighbours of Prophet Muhammad SAW. One also comprehends as to what attracted the Prophet all the way from Makkah to this precious land and why did he chose to spend the rest of his life over here. The true spirit of Ansaar after the Hijrat, when they actually offered half of their belongings to the 'Muhajireen' cannot be fully understood till one visits the Haram Nabi and ravish their unrivaled bighearted hospitality.

PRAYING IN THE FIRST ROW

The ten years old Arab kid was adamant and would not budge. He was literally begging us for a space in the front row. He must have been a regular visitor to the Masjad Nabvi as he seemed at ease with the surroundings. Though we could not understand what he was saying but he was throwing his arms around emotionally. He was persistent and in spite of one of our friends' explanation, he kept on insisting for the space. His happiness knew no bounds as he was squeezed in and thanked us profusely at the end of prayers.

As the Aqamat started, the gentleman in the second row sneaked his way between us. Though we tried to resist a bit, yet he was resolute and refused to move. He was well clad and appeared a very cultured person. Later on, it transpired that he was a 'doctor of Physics' and a Professor in a university. I was a little surprised that an apparently worldly 'literate' person was so keen to pray in the front row. The same person was immensely grateful when he was invited to the front row at another occasion. We realized that every time that he was sitting in the second row, he was looking for a place in the front row and would jump forward on finding any 'possibility' of a space.

The gentleman was above sixty, weighed more than 120 kg and was six feet plus. He was not a person who could squeeze in a little gap. At Maghrib prayer he decided to join in the front row. Both the persons standing on his sides had to bear the immediate brunt. But the ripples of his 'attack' were palpable

even ten meters away. Perhaps he could not appreciate the hardships he was causing for others, but he was very keen to offer the prayers in the front row. He was immensely grateful for the space in the front row and returned to the second row on a promise of being invited again.

Forty years old Egyptian attired in shirt and trousers was furious for not being able to pray in the front row. Argument like, people occupying the place for the last many days, could not make sense to him. This for him was all the more a reason for some one to offer him a space to pray. By hook or crook he wanted to occupy a place in the front row. He argued incessantly and was trying to make his point vociferously. He was most unhappy on being denied a chance to pray in the front row.

An eighty years old gentleman occupied the 'place' of a gentleman who had gone out for ablution. Usually the gentleman would leave the place to the original 'occupant' but this did not happen. The octogenarian started arguing and refused to leave the spot. He had found a place in the first row and he had decided to enjoy it to full. Though every one tried to convince him but he refused to listen. He offered the prayer and on exiting he went specifically to the 'affected' person and offered his apologies and kissed him on the forehead. It seemed that he very well understood that he was wrong but the love for the first row rendered him blind and deaf to reason and logic for some time.

We, the fortunate occupants of the front row in Masjad e Nabvi, were the target of such 'loving invasions and incursions'. We had literally become the hostages of our 'exalted space'. Even going out for ablution carried the risk of being attacked by some 'foreign elements' and losing our place. Our brief 'outside journeys' had to be planned and organized before hand. Only two or three of us could go at any one time and others had to open up and guard the place. The 'zeal' of people for the front row amazed me, as they believed in 'beg, borrow or steal' a space in the front row. The aim justified all means.

We started looking for the evidence of 'rewards' of the front row. Though we could not find any direct evidence in the Holy Quran but Ahadees abound in such reference. Hazrat Baraa Bin Ghazab narrated that Prophet Mohammad PBUH reiterated,

"Allah and His angels shower their blessings on people who pray in the front rows and nothing is more dear to Allah than the steps taken to join in the congrebation." (Abu Daud)

There has been a lot of emphasis on praying in congregation. People praying at home without a valid excuse have been condoned. To encourage people to come to mosque early and occupy the front row makes good sense and sounds logical. Hazrat Abi Imama narrated that Prophet Mohammad PBUH stated that Allah and his angels bless people praying in the front row. On hearing this, the Sahaba enquired about the people in the second row? The prophet replied Allah and his angels bless people praying in the front row. The Sahaba asked again about the people praying in the second row; he replied, "yes on the second row as well!" (Mishkat AlMasabehe)

Salat is not only a personal and religious obligation but a mammoth institution in its own right. The Prophet PBUH highlighted the importance of offering prayers at the right time preferably soon after Azan. Though special emphasis has been laid on 'Salat-e-wusta' Asar prayers in the Holy Quran, the Holy Prophet PBUH also highlighted the importance of Fajar and Isha prayers in congregation. A famous Hadees narrated by Hazrat Abu Huraira enunciates that Prophet Mohammad PBUH stated, "' ....If people understood the rewards of praying in early times they will make special efforts for it; if people were aware of prizes of prayers of Fajar and Isha, they will ensure their participation even if they have to crawl to the mosque for them; if people knew what the bounties of first row are, there would be such a demand for the first row that they would have to settle it by draw" (434 Bukhari Shareef)

One does not win a place in the front row by mere occupancy rather strict criteria have been laid for it. In any mosque, the space behind the Imam in the front row is reserved for the most pious, and learned elders. People like us who can neither claim 'the piety nor the knowledge' can at least attempt to emulate such beacons. We can at least try to pray close to such people, with a hope that we may be blessed and forgiven by His unlimited kindness and love. Hazrat Abdullah Masood narrated that Hazrat Mohammad PBUH stated, "people who are wise and mature should stand closer to me and then people who are

similar to them should pray closer to them. He reiterate this three times." (Muslim Tirmizi)

There seems to be some thing in the 'upbringing' in the Arab world which has been missing in this part of the world. They seem to have developed special fondness to pray in the first row. This ardent desire dominates their entire life right from childhood to the later years of their life. Their desire to offer prayers in the prime row becomes stronger with passing years. Western education cannot dampen their yearning, and the inhibitions imposed by the so-called 'sophistication' do not hamper their love for the first row. The love for praying in congregation and that too in the first row should be developed in every Muslim heart and that should be transmitted to the coming generation.

THE JUMA PRAYERS

There is something distinctly different about Friday and the effects are palpable from the night before in Harmain Sharefain. The place looks unusually busy and the 'enthusiasm' is obvious. The effects are more pronounced during the holy month of Ramazan. Friday is like a special day, and it enjoys this distinct status among all factions of Muslim Ummah. All over the world, in all the continents, special efforts are made by the devotees to pray in congregation along with Khutba to commemorate this extraordinary day. The verses that specially address Juma prayers in the Holy Quran are: "O you who believe, when the Congregational Prayer (Salat Al-Jummah) is announced on Friday, you shall hasten to the commemoration of God, and drop all business. This is better for you, if you only knew. Once the prayer is completed, you may spread through the land to seek God's bounties, and continue to remember God frequently, that you may succeed" [62:9-11].

And of course, the religious fervour is at its peak in Harmain Sharefain, where people throng from all the corners to offer Juma prayers in congregation to invoke Allah Subhanu Taala's special blessings. Narrated Abu Huraira: Allah's Holy Prophet (PBUH) talked about Friday and said, "There is an hour (opportune time) on Friday and if a Muslim gets it while praying and asks something from Allah, then Allah will definitely meet his demand." And he (the Prophet) pointed out the shortness of that time with his hands. (Volume 2, Book 13, Number 57)

Friday assumed the importance of a 'national' day for Muslim Ummah from the inception of Islam. And, the hallmark of the day is the Juma prayers. The association with the prayers confers a corona of sanctity and holiness. Narrated Abu Huraira, "I heard Allah's Holy Prophet (PBUH) saying, "We (Muslims) are the last (to come) but (will be) the foremost on the Day of Resurrection though the former nations were given the Holy Scriptures before us. And this was their day (Friday) the celebration of which was made compulsory for them but they differed about it. So Allah gave us the guidance for it (Friday) and all the other people are behind us in this respect: the Jews' (holy day is) tomorrow (i.e Saturday) and the Christians' (is) the day after tomorrow (i.e Sunday)."

People start pouring in Masjad-e-Nabvi, as early as nine in the morning. Enthusiasts in search of 'good' places in the front row or in 'Riazul Jannat' try to come even earlier. The front few rows are blocked by ten in morning and even entry to the front compound is blocked a little later. Unlike our local traditions, where people wait till the second azan to go to mosque, Arabs make it a point to be in the mosque early in morning. Mosques are usually full by the time the Imam makes his appearance and starts the Khutba.

This holds true for all the Middle Eastern countries. To enter the mosque, after the start of Khutba, is considered to be bad manners. The importance of going for prayers at the earliest is obvious by the following Hadees: Abu Huraira narrated, The Prophet (PBUH) said, "When it is a Friday, the angels stand at the gate of the mosque and keep on writing the names of the persons coming to the mosque in succession according to their arrivals. The example of the one who enters the mosque in the earliest hour is that of one offering a camel (in sacrifice). The one coming next is like one offering a cow and then a ram and then a chicken and then an egg respectively. When the Imam comes out (for Juma prayer) they (i.e. angels) fold their papers and listen to the Khutba." (Volume 2, Book 13, Number 51)

The ambience has some special treat on this day, every one attired in clean clothes fragrance of 'Attar'. People are very keen of smelling 'nice' hence every one follows the Sunnah of applying attar. Among the front rows, attar is offered by good

natured fellows before every congregational prayers. Special efforts are made to spread this special 'aroma' all over.

The tradition of taking a bath and putting on clean clothes is well entrenched in Arab society and dates back to earlier times as is evident by following Ahadees. Narrated Ibn 'Umar: While Umar bin Al-Khattab was standing and delivering the sermon on a Friday, one of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH), who was one of the foremost Muhajirs (emigrants) came. 'Umar said to him, "What is the time now?" He replied, "I was busy and could not go back to my house till I heard the Adhan. I did not perform more than the ablution." Thereupon 'Umar said to him, "Did you perform only the ablution although you know that Allah's Holy Prophet (PBUH) used to order us to take a bath (on Fridays)?" (Volume 2, Book 13, Number 3.) Narrated Abu Said Al-Khudri: Allah's Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, "The taking of a bath on Friday is compulsory for every male (Muslim) who has attained the age of puberty." (Volume 2, Book 13, Number 4)

Though there had been a lot of emphasis on taking a bath and is proven by Ahadees, the use of scent as an 'obligation' is not proven. Narrated Abu Said, "I testify that Allah's Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, "The taking of a bath on Friday is compulsory for every male Muslim who has attained the age of puberty and (also) the cleaning of his teeth with Siwak, and the using of perfume if it is available." Amr (a sub-narrator) said, "I confirm that the taking of a bath is compulsory, but as for the Siwak and the using of perfume, Allah knows better whether it is obligatory or not, but according to the Hadith it is as above." (Volume 2, Book 13, Number 5)

People make special preparations for Juma prayers and ensure their presence by the early day. Once in the mosque there is no concept of indulging in conversation. People by and large remain busy in either reciting Holy Quran, offering Nawafil or rendering tasbeehat. Narrated Abu Huraira, "Allah's Holy Prophet (PBUH) said, "When the Imam is delivering the Khutba, and you ask your companion to keep quiet and listen, then no doubt you have not done an evil act." (Volume 2, Book 13, Number 56)

On entering the mosque, most of Arabs are very particular about offering two nawafil for 'Tahiyatul Masjid' and then get on

with their Tilawat or other prayers. This is well recommended and has its roots from the Holy Prophet's time (PBUH). Narrated Jabir bin 'Abdullah: A person entered the mosque while the Prophet (PBUH) was delivering the Khutba on a Friday. The Prophet (PBUH) said to him, "Have you prayed?" The man replied in the negative. The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Get up and pray two Rakat." (Volume 2, Book 13, Number 52). Another hadees emphasises the same point. Narrated Jabir: A man entered the mosque while the Prophet (PBUH) was delivering the Khutba. The Prophet (PBUH) said to him, "Have you prayed?" The man replied in the negative. The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Pray two Rakat." (Volume 2, Book 13, Number 53)

Arabs have tremendous love for Holy Quran, and they love reciting it. Regardless of background and social status every one seems to enjoy reciting Holy Quran. Of course, with the advantage of understanding, what they are reciting they get more out of it. Most of the people carry a Holy Quran, and they would start reciting from it as soon as they have a few minutes at their disposal. The older generation, while waiting for plane at the lounges can be seen busy reciting Holy Quran. Similarly, most of the shopkeepers, when not busy spend their time in reciting Holy Quran. Many of the Shurtas, seem busy in imbibing the eternal blessing from Holy Quran. Holy Quran has become a way of life for them as against us where we have wrapped it in multi-coloured clothes and elevated it on the mantles where no one can touch it.

In Khana-e-Kaaba, people come early and by ten o'clock all the front rows are filled up. People coming later than this have to settle for corners. The enthusiasm is over whelming and every one seems drowned in the love of Allah Subhanu Taala. Every one indulges in 'Ibadaat' to seek Allah Subhanu Taala's blessings and forgiveness.

This is the place which is the direct recipient of His blessings and envelops all, busy in praying, in His mercy. Friday is a special occasions where all these blessings enhance manifold!
Narrated Salman-Al-Farsi: The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whoever takes a bath on Friday, purifies himself as much as he can, then uses his (hair) oil or perfumes himself with the scent of his house, then proceeds (for the Juma prayers) and does not separate two persons sitting together (in the mosque), then prays

as much as (Allah has) written for him and then remains silent while the Imam is delivering the Khutba, his sins in-between the present and the last Friday would be forgiven." (Volume 2, Book 13, Number 8)

We the inhabitants of this holy land seem to hold every thing else in more importance than Juma prayers. In our local mosque which fills to brim as the 'Aqamat' starts, there are hardly a score of people when the Imam starts his address. Some how or the other people are not attracted towards the mosques as they are in the Arab world or they used to be in this part of the world. Most of us prefer to go as late as possible and come out as soon as possible. The love for mosques and hence the allied Ibadat has been lost some where on the line and so has the reverence for Juma prayers and its associated Barakat. We may take learn some lessons from our Arab brethren and make attempts to spend more time in mosque specially so on Juma.

QIAM-UL-LAIL

One loses the track of time in Ramazan in Makkah and Madinah Shareef. The clock loses its utility and the only function it serves is that of alarm clock! It's one at night, and the Masjad Nabvi is brimming with enthusiastic 'Saemeen', organizing themselves into files for prayers. This part of the night is the most demanding and Qiam-ul-Lail is the most revered Ibadat of the day and night in Ramazan Shareef. Last Ashra of the Ramazan Shareef witnesses this unique activity, which inspires the faith and deepens the beliefs.

Qiam-ul-Lail as is being offered, must be the way our elders used to pray in routine. The 'sunnah' and conventions of prolonged 'qiams and sajood' is the order of the day and it takes one back to the times of Holy Prophet. For a change one feels at peace with oneself, as there is no rush and different obligations of the prayers are performed the way they should be! Prayers are being offered the way they ought to be – totally relaxed and with utmost concentration and oblivious of the surroundings.

Qiam-ul-Lail lasts for two hours and in total one and a quarter Siparah are recited followed by three rikkats of 'Witir'. The rendering of Quran Shareef is at its best and two or three Qaris lead the prayers in turn. The qirat is most soul provoking and one laments and longs for more understanding of Quran Shareef. There are times when Quran Shareef relates to the life here after and especially about 'Azaab-e-Qabar' and 'Jahanum'. This shall bring tears in all God fearing Muslims and one finds

Arabs – young and old crying loudly. Some times the Imaam breaks down and this is followed by the people crying and wetting their eyes.

First time when we were offering Qiam-ul-Lail, as the Imam lead us to Rakooh, we having recited five times waited for him to announce the end by saying Allah Akbar. No this did not happen, as we continued praying -another five times and yet another ten times and yet another ten times- the Rakooh continued. 'Sajdas' are also prolonged, where one can supplicate to one's heart's content. It was then, that it revealed to us that in 'rakoo and Sajda' one could employ multiple prayers and open one's heart to Allah Subhanu Taala . This is undoubtedly the time when one is closest to Allah Subhanu Taala, and which could be a better time to ask for His favours, mercy and forgiveness?

"Verily, the rising by night is very hard and most potent and good for governing one self and most suitable for (understanding) the word (of Allah)" Surat Al Muzammil (6-73). Unquestionably this is the time of the day when one can concentrate better and hence pray better as well. Offering the prayers individually has its own prize, but offering the prayer in congregation, in Masjad Nabvi or Khanai-Kaaba in the last Ashra of Ramzan Shareef must be most rewarding. Even if a person is not good at Mathematics and does not understand the 'multiples', it is not difficult to deduce that it must 'weigh' very heavily among the noble deeds on the Day of Judgment.

"Is one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], in fear of the hereafter and in hope of the mercy of his Lord [like one who does not]? Say:' Are those who know equal to those who do not know?' Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding." [Az-Zumar,9] Praying at night has a distinguished place in the hierarchy of 'Ibadaat' and of course our fore fathers used to place special emphasis on it.

Some of the Sahabas used to pray all night after learning that Holy Prophet (PBUH) used to spend his nights praying. The Prophet while eulogizing 'Qiam-ul-Lail' heaped so much praise that every one took upon him self to offer Qiam-ul-Lail or Tahujjud. Allah Subhanu Taala unlimited kindness came to their

rescue and made this special concession for the Muslims as Quran Shareef reveals: "O you wrapped in Garment, Stand (to pray) all night, except a little – Half of it or a little less than that, or a little more. And recite the Quran (aloud) in a slow (pleasant tone and) style." Al Muzammil (1-4/ 73)

"Their sides part [i.e. they arise] from [their] beds." [Al-Sajdah, 16] Mujahid and al-Hasan said, "meaning, standing at night in prayer." "They used to sleep but little of the night, and in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness." [Adh-Dhariyat, 17-18] Prayers rendered at night pierce their way through the skies and are accorded special approval by Allah Subhanu Taala. Though Tahajjud has been placed very high in Islam but Qiam-ul-Lail offered in this form has then a special importance and place.

Islam, is a religion which is closest to nature! It does not demand extra ordinary from the followers. In the early days every one used to offer 'tahajjud prayers' especially after is was so obviously praised in Quran Shareef. Even at that time the Prophet had his own way of cajoling people to the right path and prayers at night as is obvious from this 'Hadees'. The Prophet, (PBUH), said: "What a great a person `Abdullah [Ibn `Umar] is, if he would only pray at night." [Agreed upon]. Saalim ibn `Abdullah ibn `Umar said, "After that, Ibn `Umar used to sleep at night only a little."

"There is a room in Paradise, its outside is seen from its inside, and its inside from its outside". "For whom, O Messenger of Allah."The Prophet, (PBUH) , was asked, he said, "For whoever makes his talk pleasant, gives food and spends the night standing [in prayer], while people are sleeping." [At-Tabarani and al-Hakim, authenticated by al-Albani]

"Whoever stands [in prayer reciting] ten verses is not written as one of the heedless, and whoever stands [in prayer reciting] one hundred verses is written as one of the obedient, and whoever stands [in prayer reciting] one thousand verses is written as one of the 'muqantireen'." [Abu Dawud, authenticated by al-Albani] Al-Munqatinroon are those who have heaped-up sums of reward.

Narrated Hazrat Aisha, "Once in the middle of the night Allah's Apostle (PBUH) went out and prayed in the mosque and

some men prayed with him. The next morning the people spoke about it and so more people gathered and prayed with him (in the second night). They circulated the news in the morning, and so, on the third night the number of people increased greatly. Allah's Apostle (PBUH) came out and they prayed behind him. On the fourth night the mosque was overwhelmed by the people till it could not accommodate them. Allah's Apostle came out only for the Fajr prayer and when he finished the prayer, he faced the people and recited "Tashah-hud" (I testify that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that Muhammad is His Apostle), and then said, "Amma ba'du. Verily your presence (in the mosque at night) was not hidden from me, but I was afraid that this prayer (Prayer of Tahajjud) might be made compulsory and you might not be able to carry it out." (*Volume 2, Book 13, Number 46)*

Qiam-ul-Lail is a unique experience, reminiscent of earlier days of Islam. It some how or the other brings back the memories of old times. This raises the level of Iman and purifies the soul. The faith gets stronger and beliefs find stronger footings. This may be the sweetest and worthiest reward of Ramazan Shareef.

EID IN MADINAH

As the hustle and bustle of Iftar settles down and Maghrib prayers are offered, the people in Haram Shareef wait for the sighting of moon and announcement of Eid. There is no formal announcement, rather the end of Ramazan and the advent of Eid is welcomed by reciting 'Talbeeh', and slowly the whole of Masjid Nabvi starts echoing with the Talbeeh. One of the groups starts in the front row from the right side and slowly their voice dissipates with time. Another group starts from the centre sitting in the middle, following a leader and repeating verses after him. Yet another group starts recital in the rear. For hours at any given time the silence is broken in the mosque with reverberations of Talbeeh. The anthem is simple and eulogizes Allah Subhanu Taala, "God is Great, God is Great, There is none to worship but Allah and all praises are for Him."

The night before Eid is regarded by the learned authorities and residents of Madinah as the night of reverence and immense 'Barakat' and emphasise on its being utilised in prayers. There is absolutely no expression of joy in public and of course no firing or crackers. The advent of Eid is treated in a very sober and mature way according to its status. One wonders as to how and from where we acquired the traditions of firing and expression of jubilation in public? Even TV in Saudia Arabia does not broadcast any special programmes or vulgar shows on eve of Eid. Roaming around in the modern shopping malls of Madinah on the night before Eid did not reveal any extravaganza. There

were no 'Eid Melas', no extra lighting or pre-Eid sales. Though shops were open till late yet there was nothing special about it. There was no pomp and show and life seemed to follow the same old pattern.

The Eid day starts with people clad in new traditional clothes appearing in the mosque early morning around 3-4 am, at the time of Tahajjud prayers, well before Fajr prayers. Small children clad in traditional attire with robes and struggling with their headgear run around gleefully. Behind the elders, walk an army of kids of different ages gracefully. Due respect is paid to elders who lead the younger ones. Normally families come in groups and head towards different parts of Haram Shareef and settle down in different rows. The main courtyard and Riazul Jannat and reserved for the elite of the town.

The main areas of Haram are filled up by 3.30 am. The corridors are then occupied and rows are formed in these areas. Corners and nooks are sought for later on. Those coming late either settle for a place outside the Haram or those who are more adventurous and well versed with the Haram find their way in and accommodate themselves comfortably by finding space in the sea of people. Even when one is convinced that the place is 'jam-packed' more people enter the Haram and are accommodated with a smile or a grin. It seems that the Haram opens its arms to accommodate people as the number keeps swelling with time.

After Fajr prayers people keep sitting in their places. 'Talbeeh', once again, starts echoing in the air! Small kids start offering dates and Aab Zam Zam to all around without any discrimination of colour, creed, age or nationality. Young children take turns to offer dates, sweets and then tissue papers. This is in following of Sunnah that Eid prayers should be offered after having something to eat. Many other people generously distribute 'goodies' they have brought. A middle aged Pakistani gentleman distributed nice quality Tasbeehs, another old man was seen distributing packets of sweets among children, and a young boy was distributing tissue papers among all. 'Itar' of high quality is offered by many people and applied generously on hands preferably right before prayers. The aroma of Itar adds to the revere and warmth of the ambience.

After the Ishraq prayers the intensity of recital of 'Talbeeh' becomes louder and more frequent. Before the prayers the Talbeeh is recited on loudspeakers and is then offered by others. The whole mosque reverberates with the echoes of Talbeeh all announcing the supremacy and love for Allah Subhanahu Taala. Then starts the Eid prayers with all 'Takbeer' which are more than we offer over here. The rendering of 'Takbeer' creates an unmatched aura and the whole place along with the 'minars and minarets' and the Nimazis in millions seem to submit very humbly to the Greatness of the Omnipotent and be a witness to it.

After the prayers Khutba is recited and people listen to it intently. One cannot help but feel sorry for many like us who cannot understand Arabic hence can neither understand what Imam is saying and more importantly what is offered in prayers. Lack of knowledge of Arabic haunts the person many a time but mostly when every one else is in tears with hands held up in the air and asking Allah Sunhanauh Taala's mercy and benevolence. Imagine a person who does not even know what one is praying and some words are rolling on one's lips which do not have the zeal of heart or brain behind it.

After the prayers people intermingle freely and they embrace each other. It usually starts from the person sitting next and then every one who comes in your way. The colour and creed does not matter. Most of Pakistanis who had been praying together for the last few days hug each other more enthusiastically. Good wishes and prayers for the return to the same place in the next year are exchanged. Indeed one submits in all humility to the immense kindness of Allah Subhanahu Taala Who offered us the opportunity to pray in proximity with His most beloved during the best part of the year- Ramazan Shareef!

MADINA EXTRA EXTRAVAGANZA

Suddenly I felt as if some one was pulling me and as I looked down I found a young boy holding on to my shirt. I was perplexed as I did not know him but he was saying something beyond my comprehension. He kept on repeating some intelligible words and pointing towards left side. Unwantedly and in my confusion I started going with him and there I was greeted with smiles and loud welcoming cheers. He was son of the host who had laid down an elaborate Iftari for guests of Allah Subhanutalla and His beloved Mohammad Salaum, whom he did not know! The place was one of the most sacred places in the world - Masjad Nabvi. There were many other people sitting over there and the only bond between them was the love of Allah Subhanutalla and His Prophet (PBUH). There were all types of bounties of God – different types of dates in abundance, many types of bread, Yoghurt with special condiment 'Dukka', different preparations of Halva and special tea.

The holy month of Ramazan brings special blessings of Almighty Allah. The whole surroundings seem blessed with His special love and kindness. And if one happens to be in Madina Shareef and that too in Haram Shareef one can be proud of his good luck and be immensely thankful to Him. And more so if this happens to be last Ashra which is the only time when the Masjad is filled with people who are in Aitakaf and remains open for twenty hours for the lovers of Islam. This is the time to win Jannat and seek His forgiveness and pardon from the core of

one's heart. Nothing can be better than to be in Madinah Shareef at this most revered time, when the whole town is wallowed in the blessings of Almighty- Ghaffar, Rehman and Raheem.

As we were going back from hotel to the Haram Shareef we saw many people chanting loudly – "Haleem, Haleem, Lamb ki Haleem". Another person was shouting, "Nihari, Pai Pai Garam garam!" A young man was shouting at the top of voice, "Biryani, Lamb ki biryani". A fifty year old Pakistani was inviting people in his loud voice, " Lamb Salan Roti, Garam a garam." This was happening after Qiam ul Lail and before Sehri. There was an open party and it seemed that hosts were more enthusiastic than the guests. This festivity was taking place outside Haram Shareef on sides of roads leading to the Haram on all four sides. People were distributing Sehri at this time along with their entourage. Many of them had parked their open vehicles on side and were supervising the distribution themselves. People would form a queue and the food was offered in disposable bowls in a most respectable way with a smile on their face and a warm 'thanks' at the end.

As we entered the outside gates of the Haram, there were many people who had laid down large plastic sheets and arranged an elaborate sehri on it. People were being invited warmly and offered different types of food. There were many people going around with flasks full of Arab tea and coffee. Not every one had extensive arrangements, some apparently not very well to do people- brought cooked food in one or two pots and offered food to the guests of Allah. Though the quantity may be less but the spirit was same and I am sure the 'Ajar' will be no less. Very commonly there will be groups of people sitting and as one would cross them one would be invited warmly. People would join each other and offer food to each other to win the 'Raza' of Allahu Subhanutaalla. Shrewd 'guests' would pick and chose and go for their choice of dishes. Many people had brought food from different sources and were sitting together and having a party. Tips were being offered as to who is offering what and where?

Inside Masjad Haram around Sehri time when people are just finished with Qiam ul Lail long plastic sheets are unrolled at different sites. Here the staple food is dates, yoghurt, bread and tea. Cooked food is not allowed inside the Haram for obvious

reasons. Many people go outside for the cooked food and savour themselves. Some prefer to go to the same source and some being more innovative and adventurous explore newer avenues and taste foods of different array. The mood is festive and every one has a smile on his face. After all who can be more fortunate than them to be blessed with the best of best bounties of Allah in His most selected place during His most favourite month.

Preparations start for Iftari immediately after Aasir prayers and long large white coloured sheets are laid down in front of all rows. Different areas or to be more specific different parts of rows are demarcated by mutual agreement by different hosts on the very first day of Ramazan. Same areas are adhered to till the end of the holy month. The beauty is that every nook and corner of the Masjad Haram is being supplied almost similar food with similar enthusiasm. Every one is important -those occupying the front row, and those sitting in the last rows, those ravishing the Divine blessing in Riaz Ul Jannat and those sitting outside the Haram from where their focal point is Green tomb. Provisions are made for those who are late and find space near doors and in corridors. Important thing is spirit and there is no dearth of it!

All sheets and bowls used are disposable and are disposed of properly. Fortunately, in spite of all ill discipline otherwise, people refrain from throwing things around. Every one takes upon oneself to keep the place clean. All sheets are packed and disposed of in drums. All cups, used for dates, tea and Aab Zam zam, which must be in millions, are disposed of properly. Tissues papers are distributed freely and are used extravagantly. Many people bring tissue paper boxes in scores and distribute freely. Imagine the spirit- to keep the Haram clean and tidy.

I was very fortunate to find almost same place as the last year. To my surprise and mirth we had same familiar faces around. The host of our section was ever young and energetic Naser Bin Abdul Munem Humudah -a trader of dates by profession who had the distinct honour of offering Iftary to the guests of Allah in the front rows of Masjad for many years. He had same old cousins and friends around, who would take pride in serving the fellow 'Saamein'. Similar arrangements as before and as lavish Iftari as in the past. He would himself ensure that every guest gets proper portions and is well looked after. Mohlem Ismail Ahmed Aljabri was ever smiling while distributing Aab Zam

Zam. He would fill a large tray and distribute the unique bounty of Makkah Shareef among all every few minutes after Iftari with smile. He would politely refuse to give water who would extend left hand. He had some thing nice to say to every one and would cheer up every one around. It was nice to see Sahal R Allam – a gentleman with polite and genteel manners who would pray along with his little children in the third row. He was one of the few with whom one could communicate as he had good command on English and was forth coming with his comments in a matter of fact way.

It was fantastic to meet old friends after a year which included ever smiling retired air force officer and a doctor in computer from USA Abdul Wali Mughni. He had plans to settle down in Saudia after living in USA for twenty years. "This is where I find the real peace of mind," he would say. Dr Zafar – a gastroenterologist from Ryadh joined us a little late was the binding spirit for all of us. His father, a doctor and a scholar of Islam and Hafiz Quran, would guide us and look after all of us. But the most social and likeable person in our group was Khan sahib of Wana! He had been in Saudia driving in different places but he was like a 'miracle man'. He was friendly with all Arabs and could communicate with every one. A pious and religious man, would look after us all. Frequently he would bring special things for us as an addendum treat!

Similar extravaganza of Iftari and sehri was being held in the ladies section. Local ladies would bring different food items from home and share with each other. Similar preparations and spirit for Iftari and Sehri were witnessed there as well. After all the object was same for every one regardless of age, sex, caste and creed to seek His blessings and forgiveness. Some of the ladies would make more elaborate arrangement and share with every one. Special kindness was shown to children who add lively hues to the picture.

Ramazan in Madina seems to be an open party where the hosts make sure that every one is looked after in a regal way. Besides spiritual elevation and blessing even the worldly needs are taken care of. This is a party where the concept of host and guest becomes indistinct as every thing is happening with the will of Allah Subhan Taala. All the efforts are focused to please Allah and His Holy Prophet (PBUH) and seek his blessings.

Every one seems blessed there- those who are guests and those who are hosts. The spirit is what counts whether one is throwing a lavish Iftari for hundreds of people or some one is offering a glass of Aab ZamZam and dates from his provided portion! This is Madina extra extravaganza where people are enjoying blessing of Allah in the most revered place among the chosen people during the most venerated last ashra of Ramazan.



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